

A SOURCEBOOK FOR DARK AGES: VAMPIRE™

Dark Ages EUROPE



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Dark Ages

EUROPE

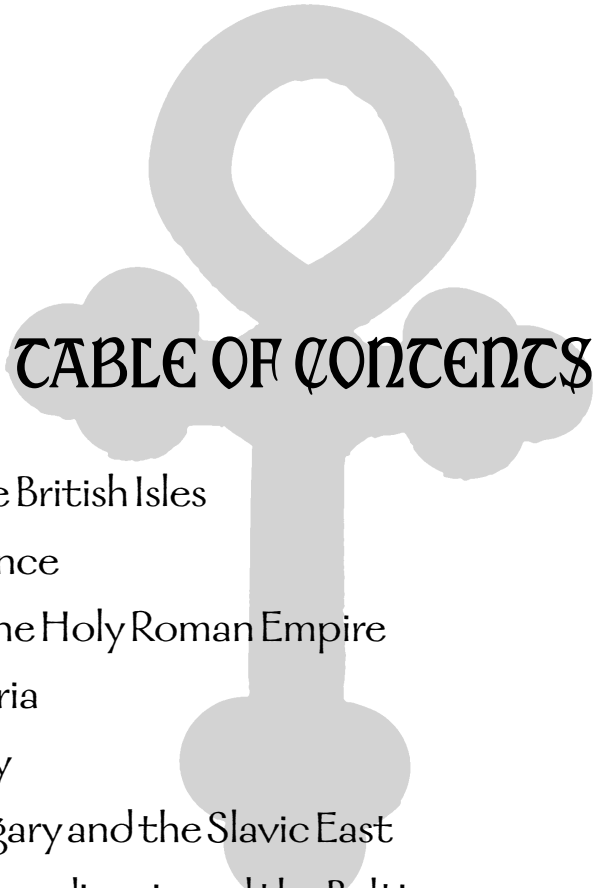


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INTRODUCTION

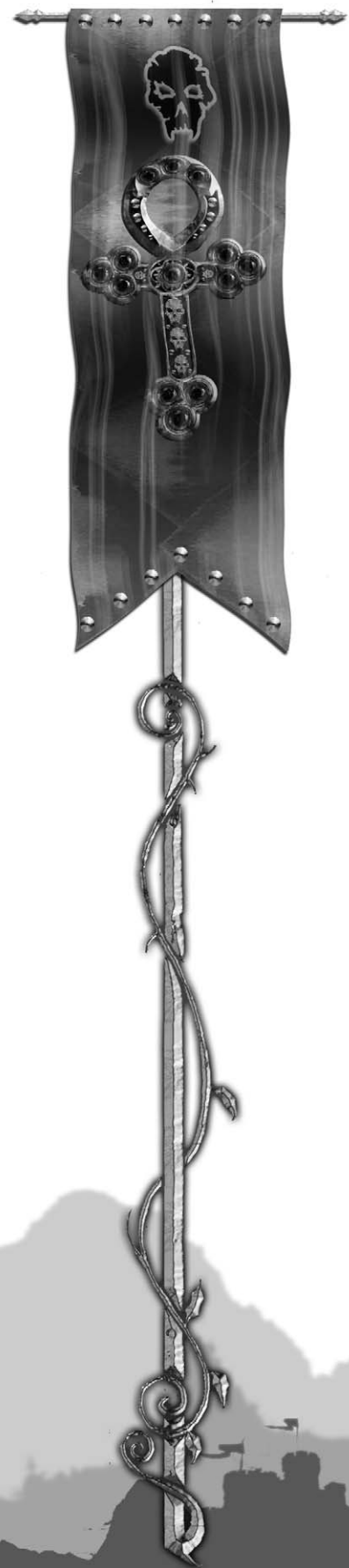
“The English are drunken cowards, the French proud, soft and effeminate; the Germans are quarrelsome and foul-mouthed, the Normans vain and haughty, the men of Poitou treacherous and miserly, the Burgundians stupid brutes, the Bretons frivolous and flight, the Lombards miserly, spiteful and evil-minded, the Romans vicious and violent, the Sicilians tyrannical and cruel, the men of Brabant are thieves and the Flemings are debauched.”

—Jacobus de Vitry, Parisian theologian on the vices of students at the University of Paris.

In the north, the fierce Norse Cainites struggle to keep their traditions safe from invaders. In the British Isles, young vampires chafe under Mithras's rule. In Germany, the Patricians appear staunchly united against interlopers, but in truth, a deep rift divides the clan. Far to the east, in Outremer, the Children of Caine watch mortals slaughter each other in the name of God, and they wonder after their own souls. Treaties are made and broken, Cainites feed on the unwary and pursue their courts and wars, leaving destruction in their wake. This is the Dark Medieval. This is the War of Princes.

With the sack of Constantinople nearly three decades gone, the conflicts between the undead have been joined in earnest. Clan wars on clan as the Tzimisce attempt to exact revenge on the Usurpers. Cainites following the Road of Heaven clash with the Sinners. In some cities, a powerful prince can keep order, but that title is very much dependant on the would-be ruler's ability to hold it. Such titles can change in the space of one night, and word of such changes travels slowly. A vampire might reach a city he believes to be friendly ground only to find a hated enemy in power. Cainites ride alongside mortal armies, subtly steering them toward the havens of their foes, and they force their own levies of troops into loyalty with the blood oath.

And yet, the destruction the Children of Caine wreak on the land is nothing compared to what the Children of Seth can do. Thousands have already been put to the torch for the crime of heresy in France, and many more will follow. The Crusades have not ended, as both Islam and Christianity want control of the Holy Land. The Italian city-states battle each



other in a never-ending dance of alliance and vendetta. And all without any creature of the night so much as lifting a finger.

It's a dangerous time, made only more so by the blood-drinking demons that stalk the night. But what the mortals of the Dark Medieval don't know is that existence for these demons is just as tenuous as it is for them.

Overview

Dark Ages Europe is meant to give players and Storytellers an inkling of the scope of the Dark Medieval and of the diversity of the cultures contained therein. In this book, the reader will discover brief histories of the regions covered, descriptions of their major cities, notes on the geography of those regions and, of course, information on the Cainites of a given area. Mortal rulers are also touched upon (some, such as Frederick II, naturally merit more discussion than others).

The following are some general notes and concepts that readers may find useful.

Chronology

Dark Ages Europe (and any future Dark Ages product) is set in AD 1230. Events that occurred *before* that year are referred to in past tense, whereas events that take place *during* or *after* AD 1230 use present tense. While occasionally making reference to the future of a person or a region, this book concerns itself with the recent history of Europe for the most part, rather than attempting to cover too broad of a span of time. This is largely for space reasons. Just as we don't have room in this book to cover all of the facets of medieval life that we would like to, we don't have room to include a comprehensive history of Europe.

This attitude is true of characters, as well. (For instance, fans of **Vampire: The Dark Ages** will notice that the "Destiny" section has been cut from characters.) We feel that this decision gives the Storyteller more freedom to choose the fates of important characters without tying them to "canon." On the few occasions that we break this rule and mention a character's fate, please understand that it's meant only as a polite suggestion. Feel free, as always, to fold, spindle and mutilate the published material to suit your chronicle's needs.

Nations

The modern concept of "nations" doesn't really apply so much to medieval Europe. Monarchs can rule lands they have never seen by virtue of marriage or inheritance, which does nothing for nationalistic fervor. Plus, as wars and territorial battles were fought daily, borders tended to shift. In the maps in this book, we've paid more attention to the location of cities than to exact "national" borders. See "Chapter by Chapter" for a brief rundown of what territories each chapter covers.

How to Use This Book

Players and Storytellers can make use of **Dark Ages Europe** in a number of ways, depending on the needs of their chronicles.

A Storyteller might choose to run a chronicle that spans various parts of Europe. This idea is especially appropriate if the coterie has no fixed domain or if the chronicle is meant to take place over the course of a pilgrimage. Either way, **Dark Ages Europe** can serve as a "travel guide" of sorts. The Storyteller can look ahead to where the characters may end up and use any of the myriad plot points mentioned throughout the book as story hooks for the coterie.

The Storyteller might also use this book to select a spot for her chronicle. Do the players seem geared to tell stories about the struggles of the nobles and the peasantry? Perhaps the Storyteller should consider the Holy Roman Empire, as the cold war between the Antasian and Patriarch Ventrue might highlight such a conflict nicely. If more direct conflict is the order of the day (or night), maybe Prussia or Lithuania, where Christian knights war on the native people, would be more appropriate. The material in **Dark Ages Europe** could inspire a Storyteller to research her chosen area further, whether with other sourcebooks (such as **Transylvania by Night**) or with actual historical material (such as those sources listed at the end of this introduction).

Players might find possibilities for character concepts lurking herein. It's one thing if a character was a "French peasant" during his mortal life, but suppose he was a peasant from Albi? Did he witness any of the horror of the Albigensian Crusade? Was his Embrace perpetrated by a fleeing Cainite who needed an extra set of hands? Likewise, the player should consider his character's place in the War of Princes. Is he indifferent to the whole thing, or has he sworn fealty to one of the courts? As **Dark Ages Europe** looks at these courts in somewhat greater detail, it could inform the decision-making process.

Finally, although **Dark Ages Europe** is written from a largely vampiric standpoint, the information presented herein is just as useful for a **Dark Ages: Mage** game, or as a reference for any Dark Ages release.

Powers of the Day and Night

Included in each chapter is a sidebar giving brief descriptions of both mortal and Cainite leaders for the region. As mentioned previously, however, nations are defined more by who rules them than by actual borders, so the same people may appear in the sidebars for several different chapters. All this means is that the given leader is important in the region, which in turn means that any politically savvy character, undead or otherwise, will

have heard *something* about the leader. Political rumors fly in the Dark Medieval, just as they do in the modern age. Actually recounting such rumors aloud, however, can mean a criminal charge in some places, so those who wish to poke fun at their rulers had best do so by allegory and satire. Commissioning ballads against a political rival, in fact, is an effective method of striking against him without dirtying one's hands.

The Cainite section of each opening sidebar reveals the vampires' names, clans, generations and positions in society. While we list generation and clan to save time, understand that the "common Cainite" in another country won't necessarily know this information. For example, most Cainites involved in any way with the War of Princes will know that Jürgen of Magdeburg is Hardestadt's childe, and probably that both are Ventruë, but their generations are anyone's guess. Likewise, vampires in the British Isles may know that the Baroness of Gloucester is a Malkavian, but that information might not have spread as far as Germany. When running a **Dark Ages: Vampire** chronicle, the Storyteller should feel free to spread seeds of misinformation (and the players should remember that their characters have not read this book).

Chapter by Chapter

Introduction: The part you're reading now.

Chapter One: The British Isles contains information on the Baronies of Avalon and Mithras's rise to power, as well as on Aquitaine, England's last French holding.

Chapter Two: France details the Toreador Courts of Love as well as the Albigensian Crusade's bloody legacy.

Chapter Three: The Holy Roman Empire examines Hardestadt's ambitions (and those of his childe, Jürgen of Magdeburg) as well as the lands of Germany and the island of Sicily.

Chapter Four: Iberia touches on the lands torn by the *Reconquista* and the vampiric machinations therein.

Chapter Five: Italy explores the Papacy, the Italian city-states and their notable Cainites.

Chapter Six: Hungary and the Slavic East details the ongoing struggle between the Fiends and the Tremere as well as updating information from Transylvania by Night.

Chapter Seven: Scandinavia and the Baltics discusses the Northlands and the vampires who brave the Lupines and the scant mortal population to seek power there.

Chapter Eight: Byzantine Successor States shows the fate of Constantinople and the new kingdoms that have formed in the wake of its fall.

Chapter Nine: Outremer explains the vampiric accord called the Diet of Olives and how the undead exist in the Holy Land.

Useful Sources

The following books and websites were useful during the research and writing of **Dark Ages Europe**. Storytellers and players who are interested in using the history of the region in their chronicles should consider giving some of them a look.

Books

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<http://www.britannica.com/>

<http://encarta.msn.com/reference/>

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CHAPTER ONE: THE BRITISH ISLES

O, let us pay the time but needful woe,
Since it hath been beforehand with our griefs.
This England never did, nor never shall,
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,
But when it first did help to wound itself.
Now these her princes are come home again,
Come the three corners of the world in arms,
And we shall shock them. Nought shall make us rue,
If England to itself do rest but true.
—William Shakespeare, The Life and Death of King John

In AD 1154, Henry of Anjou ascended to the throne of England. Already lord of Anjou and Normandy by birth, and of Poitou, Gascony and Aquitaine by his marriage to Eleanor of Aquitaine, his succession created one of the most powerful empires in Europe. The year 1154 also saw the rise of another more shadowy empire, that of Mithras, the two-millennia-old Ventrue who had dominated Britain during the time of the Romans. The fortunes of the mortal empire have waxed and waned. Britain has gained substantial influence in Wales, Scotland and Ireland but lost the majority of the Angevin lands in France during the reign of Henry's son John. By contrast, Mithras's shadow realm, the Baronies of Avalon, has prospered in the years since his reappearance.

MORTALS

Henry III Plantagenet — King of England. The young king has only recently come into his majority and is currently seeking to regain his lost French lands.

Richard of Cornwall — Earl of Cornwall and Count of Poitou, the king's rebellious younger brother.

Richard de Clare — Ambitious Earl of Gloucester and lord of Glamorgan.

Richard le Grant — Archbishop of Canterbury and head of the Province of Canterbury.

Richard le Poor — Prince-Bishop of Durham wielding formidable religious and secular authority in the Palatinate of Durham.

Walter de Gray — Archbishop of York and head of the Province of York. A strict but effective leader with sound financial sense and an eye for detail.

Llywelyn Fawr ap Iorworth, "the Great" — Prince of Wales. Powerful lord of Gwynedd and overlord of Wales. Ostensibly Henry's vassal, bound by marriage to King Henry's half-sister, Joan.

Alexander II — King of Scotland and lord of the Honor of Huntingdon. Nominal vassal of Henry, also bound by marriage to one of the king's sisters.

Hugh de Lusignan — King Henry's stepfather and rebellious lord of Marche and Angoulême.

Avalon and the Angevin Empire are inextricably intertwined, and understanding the politics and society of one demands knowledge of the other. Likewise, understanding the situation in 1230 requires knowledge of the past. The history of England and its satellites has shaped the nature and outlook of the people, and many Cainites extant tonight remember not only the time before Angevin rule but before even the Normans invaded in 1066. Many hail from the times of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms or the centuries of chaos that marked the interregnum between the rules of the Romans and the Saxons. A few even claim to pre-date Rome.

A History of the Angevin Empire

Humans have been living in the British Isles since the fifth millennium before Christ, but the date of the

CAINITES

Mithras — (4th-generation Ventrue) Prince of London, god of warriors and lord of the Baronies of Avalon.

Melusine d'Anjou — (7th-generation Toreador) "Queen" of Winchester and Mithras's main rival.

Meerlinda — (5th-generation Tremere), head of the Lion's Gate chantry in Durham and founder of the Tremere Inner Council.

Stephen — (5th-generation Ventrue), Influential Cainite Baron of Lincoln, currently faced with rebellious neonates and power-hungry neighbors.

John de York — (6th-generation Ventrue), Baron of York and conspirator against Mithras.

Adrian — (8th-generation Toreador), Cainite "Archbishop" of Canterbury.

Aelfred — (8th-generation Toreador), Heretic "Deacon" of Norwich.

Nathaniel (6th-generation Brujah), Baron of Carlisle and conspirator against Mithras.

Seren — (7th-generation Malkavian), Baroness of Gloucester.

Marcus Verus — (5th-generation Ventrue) Baron of Chester.

Genevieve "Ragged Jenny" de London — (8th-generation Nosferatu), criminal mastermind of London and Promethean.

Rhodry ap Geraint ap Mithras — (6th-generation Ventrue), the weak "Baron" of Gwynedd.


Magda — (5th-generation Lhiannan), "The Witch of Connacht."

Gerard le Vieux — (8th-generation Toreador), Baron of Bordeaux.

Ranulph Longsword — (7th-generation Toreador), "Bishop" of Cahors and overseer of the Cainite Heresy in the Angevin domains.

first Cainite presence is unknown. Cainites who remember those nights may still exist, but none have spoken of those times, and written records do not appear until shortly before the Roman invasion. The Toreador claim involvement in the creation of the stone circles that dot the island and in the forging of the beautiful works that have been found in a number of stone tombs. The truth of the matter, however, is lost to the mists of history. The Gangrel state that their presence in the British Isles dates back to the dawn of time, when they pursued a "great betrayer" to these lands and waged war on her amid the primal woodlands, becoming regarded as gods by the mortals. This is widely believed to refer to the pursuit of the Lhiannan, the barbaric offshoot of the Gangrel known to have strong ties to the Celtic peoples who predominated until the arrival of the Saxons.

The natives at first tolerated the arrival of their "civilized" companions from Rome, but as the mortal



and vampiric invaders sought to impose their will on society, reshaping it to meet their own desires, tolerance turned into resentment and then outright warfare. Perhaps the most significant event of these early days of Roman rule, if not the history of British Cainites, was the arrival in AD 71 of a Ventrue Methuselah. Embraced far to the east by Veddatha (the Ventrue Antediluvian), the young warrior suborned the cult of a Persian war-god, establishing himself as the living embodiment of the deity Mithras. Having journeyed through Greece and the East, Mithras eventually came to Rome where his cult gained particular favor among the legions. Followers of the bull-god were present in every major campaign of the empire, including that in Britain. Stories of the conflicts in the new province soon reached his ears and, in search of new challenges and opponents, Mithras set off for this cold and distant land. His plans were unknown, but in the end he would stay in Britain for more than a thousand years.

Campaigns against the Welsh eliminated the last remaining threat to Roman rule and led to the establishment of a series of forts in the subdued land. The military action also served as a cover for Cainite action between supernatural opponents, in which the Lhiannan and their pagan mortal associates were the main targets of the assault. The center of druidic and Lhiannan power, Mona (now Anglesey), had been razed by the Romans in AD 60, but outlying communities continued to subscribe to the outlawed ideologies. Efforts to subdue the Picts of Hibernia were less successful. The legions handily defeated the barbarian hordes in pitched battles, but the Picts rarely allowed themselves to be drawn into such engagements. Furthermore, Lupines often accompanied the Pictish raiders, allowing them to maul the mortal forces. Mithras reveled in these battles, exploiting the ongoing conflict with the Picts and Lupines to sate his bloodlust. The border skirmishes raged for half a century but the mortal authorities eventually decided to approach the problem from a different angle: They ordered the construction of a wall across the length of the northern frontier. Later for the ruling emperor, Hadrian, the wall incorporated numerous forts and watchtowers that became a bastion of the Mithraic cults.

Despite his frequent absences in the northern battles, Mithras's influence grew steadily over the years, his cult becoming one of the principal religions of Roman Britain, with his temples — *mithraei* — dotting the land. The cult attracted a number of Cainite adherents, but even those who didn't subscribe to Mithraism turned to the Methuselah for guidance. By the middle of the second century, Mithras was the most powerful Cainite in Britain, the dark shadow of the Roman governor for all intents. Under Mithras's aegis, the Ventrue came to be the most powerful clan in Britain, establishing a hegemony that would only waver with the fall of the empire, and which endures in some form until the Anarch Revolt in the 15th century.

The cornerstone of Mithras's rule, religion, also proved to be his greatest weakness. He resented the growing influence of Christianity — a religion that subsumed many elements of his own cult, including the celebration of December 25th, tales of a virgin birth, and the death and resurrection of its figurehead. He is widely believed to have been behind the scattered acts of persecution against adherents of the new faith, both Cainite and mortal, and he took a personal interest in Constantine the Great, who was proclaimed emperor at York in 306. Mithras hoped to use his influence over Constantine to crush the “upstart” religion, but he spectacularly failed in this, when the emperor accepted Christianity as the official religion of the empire — some say under the influence of Clan Lasombra. Mithras's efforts to destroy Christianity instead became a desperate rear-guard effort.

The collapse of central government in Britain (in AD 409) was a mortal wound to Ventrue authority, and many younger Cainites turned on their elders, blaming them for their misfortunes. Mithras survived many attempts on his unlife, but other elder Cainites were less fortunate. The internecine conflict sapped Mithras's resolve. He knew that even someone of his strength and power could not hope to prevail in these circumstances, so, feeling the weight of his years, he chose to withdraw from the conflict and enter torpor beneath the floor of the *mithraeum* at Vercovicium.

The mortal nobles hired foreign mercenaries, *foederati*, who were initially loyal to their employers. Arriving in increasing numbers and realizing that the land was theirs for the taking, many brought their families with them with the intention of claiming it for their own. Saxon Cainites (mainly Gangrel and some Brujah) arrived with the *foederati* and the associated colonists, bearing no love for the Roman-British Cainites. Many British Cainites chose to accompany their mortal associates across the channel to northwest Gaul, a land that would become known as Little Britain (or, “Brittany”).

In the years before AD 500, Ambrosius and his associates fought the Saxons to a standstill, eventually inflicting a great defeat on them at Mons Badonicus. A combination of treaty and martial strength held the invaders back for several decades. In 542, however, civil war erupted among the British and resulted in the cataclysmic Battle of Camlann that led to the defeat of the rebels but also cost the life of the principal British warlord, called Arthur by the chronicles of the era.

Cainites used the struggle between the nascent states of “Angle-land” to further their own goals, expanding their influence and power across the British Isles. The Celtic lands proved to be a major obstacle, with the massive Lupine presence among the Picts hampering expansion into the lands that would become Scotland, and several ancient Cainites dominating affairs in Wales. Ireland remained beyond the reach of most Cainites

THE ONCE AND FUTURE KING

You ask of "Arthur"? Yes, I knew him. You expected me to decry him as a myth? No Arturos was all too real, as we Saxons discovered to our cost. I met him numerous times. Just as I abandoned Woden for the worship of Mithras, so did Arturos forsake Cernunnos, called by some the Horned God. Peace reigned in the mithraei, with Saxons and Britons meeting as equals in the bull-god's eyes. Back then we didn't know the truth of the living Lord of Ages.

Arturos was a brave fighter and a cunning strategist, that much I will grant him. Honorable? He was as honorable as any Roman cavalry officer, which is to say not very. The stories of chivalry and high romance are naught but fictions, products of Chretien de Troyes' overactive imagination and spread by my lady Eleanor of Aquitaine. True, he was a war-leader, but he was brutal, willing to do anything and everything to ensure victory. The legends don't tell you what he did with the prisoners after the battle of Baddon, do they? Or what his band did to the women of Ratae. Or his idea of "justice" after becoming Dux Bellorum.

Aye, he was a good warlord for the Britons, but he was a failure as a king. He lived only for battle and spent most of his reign in the saddle. The people suffered greatly, forced to support his war bands in their struggle against us invaders. He bled his people dry, and it's no surprise that his reign ended in revolt. Read what you will into his bastard son's leadership of the rebels and his concubine's flight to Ynis Witrin, but Arturos' Pyrrhic victory at Camlann, while quelling the rebellion, shattered the Britons' fighting force and assured Saxon victory.

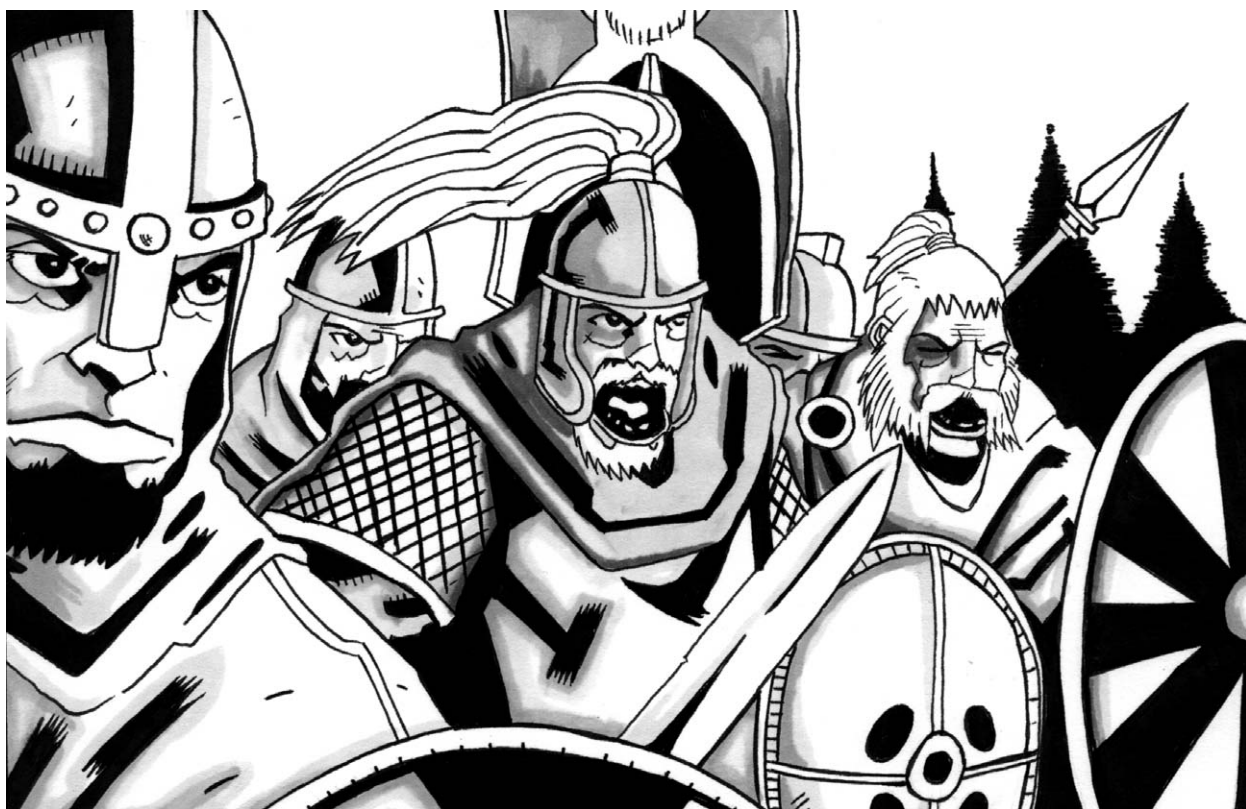
—Aethelwulf, warlord of Mithras


(save a handful of Lhiannan and their Gangrel pursuers) until the arrival of the Vikings.

As the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms struggled against Viking raiders and later Danish invaders, the Scots unified under Kenneth MacAlpin who conquered the Picts in AD 844. This victory coincided with a decline in Lupine support for the Picts and was followed by an expansion of Cainite influence in Scotland. Lupines and the fae remained a danger to vampires, but the

"new land" offered a host of opportunities for wary and adventurous Cainites. By AD 900, the Toreador had established havens in Edinburgh and Berwick. These groups would remain largely independent of their Saxon (and later Norman) siblings until the middle of the 11th century.

The arrival of Danish Gangrel and Ventrue with the invading forces had an unexpected side effect, prompting alliances between hitherto-antagonistic Cainites of Celtic, Roman-British and Saxon stock. As Angle-land





emerged as a country, so the Cainite power structure matured, and a series of regional lordships — the forerunners of the Baronies of Avalon — emerged in the middle of the 10th century. These regions would reach their ultimate bloom with the introduction of feudalism.

The 11th century was a time of immense change for England. The mortal and Cainite struggles against the Danes culminated with the destruction of the Toreador “Bishop” of Canterbury, Cerdic, in AD 1012 and the ascension of Sweyn of Denmark to the English throne a year later. Sweyn’s reign lasted only a year and was followed by a Saxon-Danish war that resulted in Canute taking the throne. The greatest change, however, came in 1066 with the death of Edward the Confessor. Harold Godwinson, Earl of Wessex, took the throne of England but found his rule challenged by both Harold Hadrada (hard-ruler) of Norway and William, Duke of Normandy. Hadrada landed forces near York but was defeated by Godwinson’s forces at Stamford Bridge. William landed several days later at Pevensey, eventually marching inland to defeat Harold at Senlac Ridge (now Battle Abbey) 19 days after Stamford Bridge.

William became known as “the Conqueror” and set about establishing his dominance over England. He built the first stages of what would become the Tower of London in 1067, and his troops subdued the northern regions of the country a year later in a series of bloody terror raids that became known as the “Harrying of the North.” Unbeknownst to him, a Triumvirate of Cainites accompanied William, bent on establishing dominance over vampiric society just as the Duke of Normandy did over the mortals. Saxon, Danish and Roman-British vampires resisted the growing influence of Roald Snakeeyes, Baron Geoffrey of Calais and Countess Liseult de Taine, but by manipulating existing conflicts, the “Triumvirate” was able to neutralize or eliminate the principal threats to its leadership. Countess Liseult later acknowledged her role in arranging the Harrying of the North to eliminate Cainite resistance in the region, little realizing that the action would lead to her doom. In the *mithraeum* at Vercovicium, Mithras sensed the bloodshed of the Harrying and awoke.

Arriving in the city he knew as Londinium, Mithras journeyed to the temple of Mithras, summoning Cainite and mortal worshipers. He didn’t take the Triumvirate into account, though, as they suddenly realized who they were facing and attacked the temple with fire. Mithras withdrew to the shires, traveling the lands while building support.

The Tremere Magus Meerlinda arrived in England in 1098, charged with establishing a chantry for her clan. The Warlocks initially sought a base of operations in southeast England, but the Triumvirate objected to their presence. Instead, Meerlinda led her followers west, eventually deciding (despite the uncomfortable aura of faith of the abbey) to settle at Glastonbury. This action provoked a massive response as clerics, magi and fae al-

lied under the aegis of the Compact of Glastonbury to oust the Cainite invaders. The “War of the Tor” lasted from 1101 until 1105 and eventually led to the Tremere’s withdrawal. Meerlinda instead journeyed north to Durham, founding the Lion’s Gate chantry in 1109.

The death of William, son of King Henry, in the wreck of the White Ship in 1120 threw the succession into chaos. Although Henry would reign for another 15 years, his daughter Matilda became heir to the throne. Married first to Henry V, Emperor of Germany, and later Count Geoffrey “Plantagenet” of Anjou, Matilda had considerable power, but the English barons did not want her to accede to the throne, preferring Henry’s nephew, Stephen. This led to a protracted civil war, the Anarchy, that saw the Final Death of Cainite Baron Geoffrey at Winchester, while “Lupine marauders” were blamed for the dismemberment of Liseult de Taine in 1141. (Both events were the work of Mithras and his agents.)

In 1152, Matilda’s son, Henry, married Eleanor of Aquitaine, former wife of Louis VII of France. This marriage created a massive power bloc, spanning the length of France from Normandy on the channel to Bayonne near the Pyrenees. A year later, Henry led troops to England and forced Stephen to acknowledge him as heir to the kingdom. Henry’s attacks also eliminated the last member of the Triumvirate, Roald Snakeeyes, and Mithras knew his time was at hand. He returned to London in 1154, assuming domain over the city at the same time that Henry became king. The Ventruë Methuselah was recognized as “Prince of London,” and he extended his influence over much of the country thanks to diligent work during his exile. Each barony swore fealty to London, forming the largest vampiric realm in Europe, just as England became part of an unprecedented empire.

Although the continental holdings were never part of Mithras’s plans, several acknowledged him as overlord. The cities of La Rochelle and Bordeaux became part of the new “Court of Avalon” while Brittany, Normandy and Poitou also gained some representation. Ironically, Henry II’s heartland of Anjou remained beyond Mithras’s grasp, dominated by the Toreador Melusine who refused to acknowledge either Avalon or the Courts of Love as her overlords. It was only in 1175, after she fought a shadow war against both the Baronies of Avalon and the Grand Court in Paris that an arrangement was reached between Mithras and Melusine. Meeting in Rouen, the Ventruë Methuselah recognized the Toreador as “Queen” of Anjou, albeit as a subordinate of Avalon. Melusine also assumed responsibility for Poitou and Gascony, leaving Mithras free to concentrate on the British Isles and northern France.

The ascension of Richard (later called “Coeur de Lion”) posed a number of problems for Mithras as he was often absent and left his gubernatorial duties in the hands of regents. Unrest in the kingdom increased, and Richard’s despotic brother, John, sought to usurp power.

Several young Cainites, mostly from Clan Brujah, tried to exploit the situation. Many were slain by the prince and his agents, but others became well established as “brigands.” The notable areas of Cainite unrest were Nottinghamshire and Sussex, the former dominated by a band of cutthroats lead by Robert Leeland. Mithras’s agents would eventually bring “Robin” Leeland low at Kirklees Abbey, but not before a 10-year insurrection that tied up a number of the prince’s resources. Richard’s death at Chalus in 1199, and the accession of John “Lackland,” began the decline of the Angevin Empire.

The disaster of the Fourth Crusade and the sack of Constantinople heralded the start of the War of Princes. Numerous revolts sprung up against Mithras’s rule, notably in Normandy and Poitou, but also in England. As the King of France launched military assaults on King John’s French holdings, Cainites struck into Avalon under cover of the mortal conflict. Normandy and Brittany fell to the French almost immediately, their Cainites cowed by the assault and acknowledging Paris’s regency after the fall of “impregnable” Chateau Gaillard. Anjou, under Melusine’s rule, proved a tougher prospect but here too the situation became untenable and the queen left Anjou after the prince refused to send assistance. Already at odds, the disdain between Mithras and the Queen of Anjou became a mutual antipathy. Further meetings between the two were cold and formal, culminating in their 1208 encounter in London where Mithras declared his intention to focus on affairs in England rather than the “sprawling morass of duchies in France.”

John’s position deteriorated. In 1213, realizing his weakness, the barons met at Bury Saint Edmunds to discuss numerous demands to set before the king. Melusine exploited the discontent, manipulating the barons and using their revolt as a cover for action against Mithras. Cainite havens across England came under attack as Melusine and disaffected Ventrue and Brujah challenged the prince’s authority. Signed at Runnymede in 1215, the Rose Treaty, named for the clan that orchestrated it, brought the Cainite strife to an end, but the mortal equivalent, the Magna Carta, failed to end the mortal civil war, even though it met the baron’s demands. The French eventually sided with the barons and invaded, but they were repelled in 1217 after the Battle of Lincoln. Numerous Cainites of the Court of Love accompanied Louis of France’s invasion force but were driven back by the “unified” British Cainites.

Lackland’s son, Henry III, came to the throne in 1216. Since he was only nine years old, regents governed in the king’s stead until his majority in 1227. Meanwhile, French perfidy cost the empire its possessions in Poitou in 1224 while forces under Hugh de Lusignan ravaged Gascony. Having rarely set foot in Anjou or Poitou since the turn of the century, Melusine took up residence in Winchester, displacing Baron Roger as head of the fief and becoming a permanent thorn in Mithras’s side.

England

Eighty years ago, England was little more than a possession that allowed the lords of Anjou to claim the status of monarch and thus equal footing with their overlord, the King of France. Since the loss of many continental holdings, the island-nation has become the heart of the Plantagenet holdings, the notion of an English state replacing that of Angevin Empire.

The Lands

The lands of England are as diverse as the people who occupy them. The Fief of Canterbury encompasses the chalk downlands of the southeast of the country, principally the counties of Kent and Sussex. Its inhabitants are mainly farmers, though fishermen also make their livings in the Medway and Channel coasts. To the west, the Fief of Winchester covers a broad tract of land, from the forests of Hampshire, across the windswept — and some say haunted — plains of Salisbury, to the low fens

A MATTER OF LINGUISTICS

Three languages pervade English society. Introduced by the Normans, the *Langue d’oil* (French) is the language of nobility and is, therefore, a mainstay of government in England. The *Langue d’oc* (Provençal) of Southern France is also known by those of Aquitanian descent and is occasionally used by troubadours and poets at the king’s court.

Middle English (a post-conquest derivative of Anglo-Saxon “Old English”) is the main language of the lesser nobles and peasants, predominating in day-to-day affairs. The lack of high noble patronage (and, therefore, official teaching) of English means that the language diverges wildly from region to region and lacks internal consistency. This irregularity of language remains as it metamorphoses and develops (adopting elements of the *Langue d’oil* as it does) into early-modern English in the 15th century.

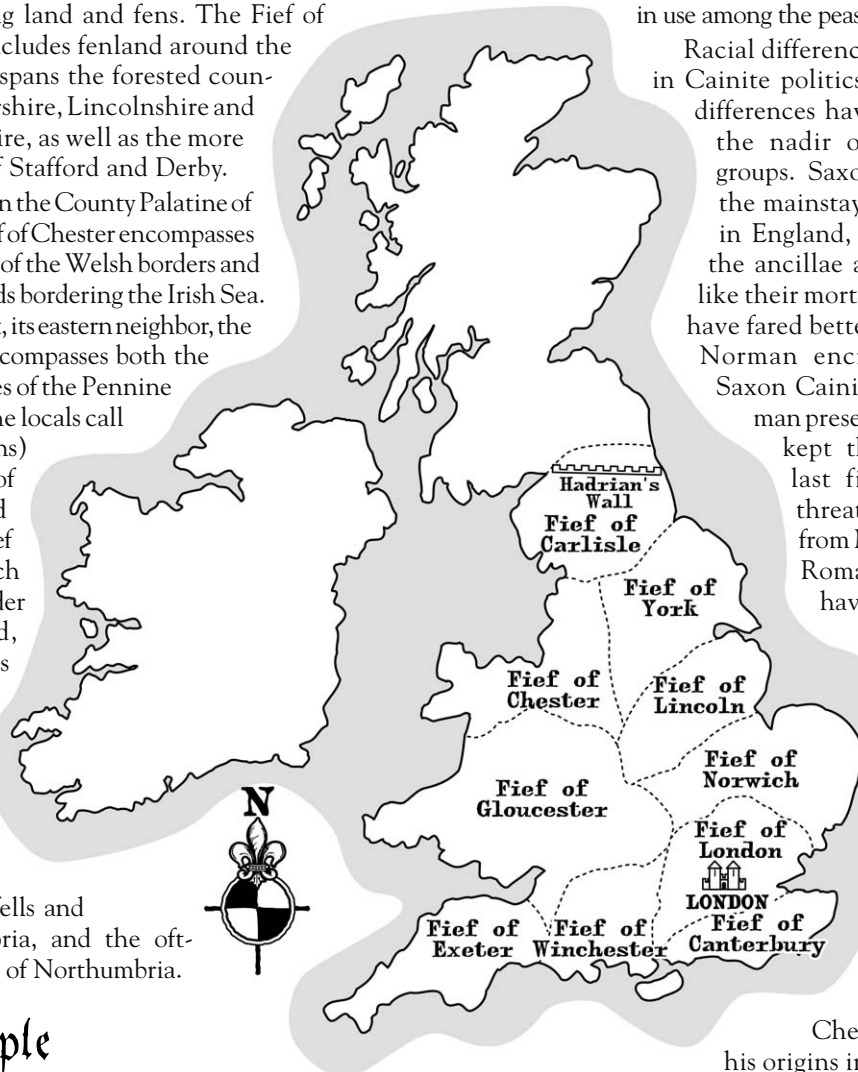
Latin is the language of religion, used in church services, and also serves as the language of scholars, particularly at the new universities in Cambridge and Oxford. Since Mithras seized the throne of London, Latin has become established as the language of the Baronies of Avalon, a pre-requisite for membership of the Privy Council or any high office. Indeed, Mithras uses Latin almost exclusively (although he speaks excellent French and English), and he refers to the cities and fiefs of Avalon by their Roman names.

Some elder Cainites also speak the language of the ancient Britons, but this language has largely died among mortals in England, save in the far west of the Fief of Exeter and in the Welsh marches. Some words remain in regional dialects, though.

around the Isle of Glass. The Fief of Exeter spans the rugged counties of Cornwall and Devon. Its lands are harsh and inhospitable but rich in mineral wealth. The Fief of London encompasses the rich river lands of the Thames as well as the woodlands of Surrey and Essex.

Further north, the Fief of Gloucester spans the River Severn, dominating the lands of Hereford and Worcester, as well as Gwent in southern Wales. These are mainly rich farmlands, though the fief also incorporates the Mendip Hills and the “mountains” of South Wales. Encompassing the flat eastern counties of Cambridge, Norfolk and Suffolk, the Fief of Norwich contains a mix of good farming land and fens. The Fief of Lincoln also includes fenland around the Wash but also spans the forested counties of Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire, as well as the more rugged lands of Stafford and Derby.

Centered on the County Palatine of Chester, the Fief of Chester encompasses the hill country of the Welsh borders and the verdant lands bordering the Irish Sea. By stark contrast, its eastern neighbor, the Fief of York, encompasses both the southern reaches of the Pennine Hills (though the locals call them mountains) and the moors of Yorkshire and Durham. The Fief of Carlisle, which forms the border with Scotland, encompasses some of the most rugged land in England, including the northern reaches of the Pennines, the fells and lakes of Cumbria, and the oft-contested lands of Northumbria.



The People

Normans — the Francophone descendants of the Conqueror and his followers — form the upper echelons of English society, though a number of Angevin and Poitevin families have also gained considerable influence since the enthronement of Henry II. Power and land across England is focused in the hands of a small number of families whose influence — as demonstrated by the end of John’s reign — can threaten that of the king. The former lords of England, the Saxons, continue as landholders in many regions, although their influence is sorely curtailed.

In the eastern regions, the peasants are principally of Saxon and Danish stock, with light skin and fair hair. People of Celtic blood with darker features predominate in the southwest, Welsh borders and the northern regions.

Over 160 years of Norman rule have begun to take the edge off Saxon-Norman relations, but cultural differences continue to dog interactions between the two groups. The Norman’s French customs and language distinguishes them from the lesser ranks and prompts many Englishmen to regard them as “foreign invaders.” Nonetheless, French has become the language of choice for the nobility — Saxon and Norman — though the Anglo-Saxon tongue is still in use among the peasants.

Racial differences play a major role in Cainite politics, as many of these differences have survived far past the nadir of their respective groups. Saxon Cainites remain the mainstay of vampire society in England, particularly among the ancillae and elders, and unlike their mortal kin, these Saxons have fared better at holding off the Norman encroachment. Many Saxon Cainites resent the Norman presence but have largely kept the peace over the last five decades under threat of grave reprisals from Mithras. Roman and Roman-British Cainites have largely succumbed to torpor or Final

Death over the centuries but a handful remain active in England, albeit eschewing the trappings of power and influence. Only Marcus Verus, Baron of Chester, acknowledges

his origins in the time of Rome.

Rumors abound that several pre-Roman Methuselahs call England home, but only one — Mithras — is widely known.

Villeins, Freemen and Their Betters

Three broad distinctions exist in the people of Britain — the peasants, the clergy and nobility — but the former in particular is broken into a host of subcategories reflecting the status, freedom and wealth of the people.

The principal distinction within the peasantry is between freemen and villeins (also called serfs). Although they are not slaves, villeins are considered property of their lord (which means that any property or land they own also belongs to the lord), and they require their lord's approval for a wide range of actions, including marriage (which requires the bride's father to pay a tax). Villeins have some rights, but only freemen can appeal to the king's justice or (in theory) move about at will. In reality, many freemen are bound to specific lords and subject to petty discriminations, and the living circumstances of villeins and freemen differ little. The majority of both groups are farmers, either growing crops or raising livestock and eking out a subsistence living. Calling a freeman a villein, however, is grounds for a court case.

Townfolk, mostly freemen, are a distinct minority in the Dark Medieval, but they are generally richer and more diverse than their country relatives. The higher echelons of urban society rival or even exceed the nobility in wealth, residing in lavish houses with gardens, workrooms and shops. Most urban denizens are comfortably well off compared to the rural kine, with craftsmen and merchants forming the upper crust of society and servants and laborers the lower. The poorest urbanites live in considerable hardship, though, lacking even the farmland that would allow a rural villein to subsist. Life expectancy, particularly among the poor, is lower than in the countryside as a result of poor sanitation and ever-present disease in the close confines of the town. Infant mortality is common, and the age of 40 is considered venerable among the lower classes.

Relatively few Cainites were villeins in life. Those few that were principally belonged to the Nosferatu, Ravnos and Brujah clans. Instead, the Angevin Low Clans draw their membership from the freemen, quite often the craftsmen and merchant classes of the towns, leaving the clergy and noble classes to the High Clans. The professional classes — bailiffs, clerks and the like — occupy a gray area, coveted

alternately by the Low Clans and their "betters." Despite their reputation as power-seekers, Angevin Ventruue have shown a willingness to Embrace members of the merchant and professional classes in order to covertly expand their power and influence.

Politics

Only 23 years old, the King of England has struggled to gain control of his country, facing rebellious barons and "allies" out to advance their own position. During his childhood, a regent led the country. Since 1227, Henry himself has overseen matters of state, though the regent, Hugh de Burgh, has remained one of his closest advisors. The king reigned unchecked before the civil war, but the Magna Carta placed limitations on what he could and could not do, thus ensuring the rights of the nobility and common folk. Nonetheless, the king's power remains formidable, and only that of the Church and the authority invested in the County Palatinates of Chester and Durham can circumvent it. (John passed control of the country to the pope who serves as King Henry's feudal overlord.)

The barons oppose a number of Henry's actions, notably the appointment of numerous Poite-

vins to key governmental posts and the king's acceptance of papal influence. The nobles seek to influence the king through the Great Council, and

they will eventually seek to usurp the king's power through the Provisions of Oxford in 1258.

Mithras's rule over the Cainite population has never been as absolute as that of the mortal monarchs. Instead, his authority stems from being the lynchpin in a network of interlocking alliances that run the length and breadth of England. No other Cainite has the power or influence to stand as lord of such a vast land, but Mithras's claim would be untenable without the barons' support. Until 1216, the agreement between Mithras and the Cainite barons was a mix of informal promises and blood oaths. The instability that accompanied the onset of the War of Princes and



the deteriorating mortal situation in England prompted a formalization of the agreement in the Rose Treaty. This agreement solidified the Cainite politics of England but came at a price. Mithras, warrior god, would no longer be allowed to raise or lead armies beyond a bodyguard unit intended to ensure the safety of the prince and his haven. Instead, only the barons are allowed to field troops, but they are bound to defend London — some by loyalty or self-interest, others by the blood oath or membership of the Cult of Mithras. Rivalries between the barons ensure that none will stab the prince in the back for fear that their neighbors will turn on them. But should several barons ally against Mithras...

The Toreador are Mithras's main political rivals. Their influence in the Church disrupts his own in secular society at times, and their control of the French courts is an ongoing concern to the Ventrue. Although he publicly decries the "coward games" of politics, Mithras has come to enjoy affairs of state, especially his sparring with the Toreador Walter de Vézelay, the representative of Prince Geoffrey of Paris. In stark contrast, Mithras' detests the Tremere. He tolerates the presence of Meerlinda's chantry in Durham, but he has blocked her efforts to establish a presence in London and several other southern fiefs. The prince would dearly love to crush Lion's Gate, but his feudal duties to Baron John of York (in whose barony the Palatinate of Durham lies) prevent him from doing so.

The principal threat to Mithras's rule comes from young Cainites who have begun to chafe under his authority. Many feel that their prospects are non-existent, either as a result of the elders' power or the position of their clan. (Most of the rebellious individuals belong to the Low Clans.) Some merely complain about their situation, but others are taking more direct action, banding together for protection and to pose a credible threat to the authorities. Mithras and the barons have staged attacks on the marauders, but for every band eliminated (such as that of Robin Leeland, who was driven into torpor at Kirklees in 1212), two more spring up. The Anarch Revolt does not erupt until the late 15th century, but its first roots are already taking hold in the Baronies of Avalon thanks to groups such as the Prometheans.

Mithras's Council and Advisors

Mithras's power is far reaching but relies on the cooperation of the other Cainite magnates of Britain. To that end, Mithras relies on a pair of councils to govern the Court of Avalon and its satellites.

The Privy Council is the highest authority in the land, and it comprises the Barons of Lincoln, York, Carlisle and Canterbury. Representatives of the Baron of Bordeaux also sit on the council, but the Baron of Winchester, arguably the most powerful Cainite noble after the prince, neither attends nor sends a representative. The Privy Council has no innate powers but the Blood Laws (see page 18) allow

a unanimous decision among the barons to overrule the prince's actions. Infighting and Mithras's influence via the blood oath and his warrior cult give him almost free reign, though.

The Grand Council (not to be confused with the mortal Great Council) incorporates all the Cainite barons of England, as well as representatives of the Welsh, Scottish and Irish fiefdoms. The Grand Council has no legal power in the Baronies of Avalon, but it serves as a means for airing disputes, gathering information and disseminating decrees.

The Cappadocian Roger de Camden (usually just called "Lord Camden") serves as Mithras's seneschal and represents the prince in council when he is otherwise engaged. Camden is a formidable administrator and canny politician, but he is not well liked by the barons or the other members of the prince's court. Richard de Worde is Mithras's spymaster. He exploits a wide range of Cainite and mortal agents to gather information for his liege, but he is not a typical Nosferatu. He appears openly at the prince's court, to the Toreador's chagrin, and has a haughty manner more in line with a Ventrue or Lasombra. The Saxon Gangrel Aethelwulf serves as Mithras's warlord, leading his bodyguard and enforcing the prince's dictates within the Barony of London. A hardened warrior and initiate of the Mithraic cult, Aethelwulf is fiercely loyal to the prince and advises him on a range of military matters. Despite (or perhaps because of) his lack of social graces and forthright manner, Aethelwulf is one of Mithras's closest associates. The Ventrue ancilla, Valerius, has twice sought to usurp the warlord's position, but he presently lacks the influence to unseat the elder Gangrel.

International Relations

King Henry came to power during a French invasion of England, and he saw the loss of Poitou and the ravaging of his holdings in Aquitaine before his majority. He has made recovering these lost lands a high priority. Diplomatic pressures on King Louis have come to naught, and, against the advice of former regent Hubert de Burgh, King Henry is preparing an expedition to France (which lands in Brittany and recovers the Isle of Oleron, but is otherwise a failure).

Unlike his mortal counterpart, Mithras has generally good relations with his neighbors on the European mainland. Despite the expansionist activities of the Parisian Great Court, the Methuselah maintains close ties with Paris. Although Mithras and Alexander clashed over the effects of French expansionism into Angevin lands, the two Cainites respected each other. The new prince, Geoffrey, is an unknown quantity, and Mithras recognizes the hand of Salianna, the Matriarch of the Courts of Love, in recent events (see Chapter Two). On top of mortal events, the hitherto good relationship between the two courts has grown sour, although Mithras remains in regular contact with the Matriarch of France.

Mithras's relationship with the Fiefs of the Black Cross is less cordial, though he maintains close ties with individual Ventruie in the Holy Roman Empire. The prince's main problem lies with Hardestadt, who dislikes Mithras's unofficial alliance with the Tzimisce. Even though this "alliance" is little more than sharing information about their mutual enemy — the Tremere — it is at odds with the Black Cross's plans in Eastern Europe. Likewise, and despite his "England first" policy, Mithras regards Hardestadt's growing ties to France an infringement on *his* interests. Currently, neither of the rulers is prepared to compromise.

Law

English law is a chaotic amalgam of Anglo-Saxon, Danish, Norman and Angevin traditions. Until the Magna Carta, there was no centralized or written form of law, so numerous regional variations existed, particularly at the manorial and hundred courts. Despite the efforts of the barons, it will be another 30 years until the Provisions of Westminster (1259) and the Baron's War (1263-1267) that the issue will be settled, with the reign of Edward I (1272-1307) seeing major constitutional advances.

The issuance of various town charters during the reigns of Richard and John has further complicated matters, granting individual towns specific rights or exemptions. The following three strands of law currently exist in England: Common Law, deals with a wide range of secular matters; canon law, relates to the Church; the Blood Laws, Mithras's codified system of laws and courts, are intended to uphold the Traditions.

Common Law

Common law governs the actions of secular English society. It recognizes two distinct forms of crime: those involving low justice and those involving high (or king's) justice.

- **Low Justice:** This element of common law deals with day-to-day matters, including fines for trespass, brawling, theft and debauchery. The lord of the manor or a hundred- or shire-court oversees such matters at the local level, so they are subject to a number of regional variations. Lords may dispense summary justice when a criminal is caught in the act, but a trial takes place otherwise, with local juries assisting sworn officials.

- **High Justice:** High justice deals with more serious offences such as rape, mutilation, murder and treason. Such matters are always handled by the Royal Courts, usually either the County Courts, at the King's Bench in Westminster. In exceptional circumstances, the king himself handles them personally.

- **Forest Law:** Some regions of England are designated Royal Forest to protect the land for the king's hunt. Game may not be hunted within these boundaries without royal permission, nor may fires be lit or trees felled. Foresters enforce forest law, which falls outside the purview of common law, and punish offenders with amercements

(fines). These fines make up a major source of income for the crown.

Canon Law

Canon law applies to members of the Church and governs the behavior of the clergy and their institutions. Until the reign of Henry II, canon law took precedence over secular law and meted out relatively light punishments. The Constitutions of Clarendon (the agreement that shattered the relationship between Henry II and Thomas à Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury) attempted to reverse this situation, though the move foundered after Becket's murder. The Church *may* hand a cleric over to secular authorities, but it is not compelled to do so, nor may someone tried under canon law be prosecuted for the same offense under common law. Nonetheless, the Constitutions of Clarendon do allow the crown to protect its interests if threatened by the Church.

The Blood Laws

The Traditions of Caine are central to the unives of all Cainites, but Mithras has used his position as Monarch of Avalon to formalize the Old Ways within his domain. These Blood Laws specify the Traditions, making them unambiguous and related to the unliving conditions of England. Mithras's followers rigidly enforce the Blood Laws in the cities, particularly in London and the baronial seats, with punishments ranging from fines (usually a "blood tith" and revocation of rights to banishment or blood hunt. Elsewhere, particularly in the countryside, law gives way to convention, and minor infractions are overlooked. Nonetheless, visiting Cainites are advised to seek the patronage of a local and become familiar with the Blood Laws as speedily as possible.

(For more information on legality in the Dark Medieval, vampiric and otherwise, see **The Ashen Thief**.)

Religion

The Church of Rome is the preeminent religion of England among both mortals and Cainites, and its authority is also acknowledged — grudgingly — in secular matters following John Lackland's resignation of the kingship in 1213. Peasant traditions originating with the old British and Saxon religions maintain a foothold in rural areas, but they are being squeezed out by Christianity.

Prince Mithras despises Christianity as a religion of weaklings, but he has a grudging respect for the crusader zeal it inspires. Regardless, his long-term goals include the ejection of Christianity from his domain. Mithras's main tool for this is the Persian warrior cult that bears his name. A major sect among the Romans, Mithraism is once more on the rise in England after the reappearance of the Lord of Ages. The faith is particularly common among Cainite warriors, but a number of worthy mortals have also been

inducted into its mysteries. Mithraism serves as an extension of the prince's power, allowing him to control his subjects on a spiritual as well as secular level and establish a large network of followers and influence.

In the case of older Cainites, Christianity is little more than a social veneer that they accept as part of the Caine story. Many continue to practice the religions of their living days, be it of Rome, Britain or the Saxons, when they bother at all. The old British religions' association with the druids makes their open practice a dangerous prospect. Cainites who follow such religions risk reprisals from vigilant Gangrel who may take their pagan worship as a sign of ties to the hated Lhiannan. Aware of this danger and hidden in the distant parts of Britain, the Lhiannan take care not to reveal themselves save to trusted individuals.

The Baronies of Avalon

The 10 fiefs of England form the core of the Baronies of Avalon, disparate lordships brought together under Mithras's aegis to form a cohesive, albeit imperfect, vampiric nation. The Cainites of Wales, Scotland and Ireland acknowledge Mithras's suzerainty, but they neither regard themselves (or are regarded by Mithras and the barons) as part of Avalon. Only Aquitaine — or at least the barony of Bordeaux — is considered part of the Court and is contested by the French.

The lands and mortals of each fief vary considerably, as do the Cainites who thrive off them. All are centered on a town or city that gives the fief its name but they encompass large tracts of farmland, forest and hills. Cainite power in these more rural areas is often shaky as Lupines or the fae prowl the countryside in the western and northern fiefs. When compared to Wales, Ireland or the highlands of Scotland, however, the other supernatural beings are a minor inconvenience.

London

London is the heart of the Baronies of Avalon, home to Mithras's court and many institutions of mortal government. Technically not a fief — Mithras holds power directly here — it encompasses the river lands of the Thames as well as the counties of Essex, Surrey and Herfordshire. The city of London is the focus of the fief, but the towns of Colchester and Saint Albans play a major role in mortal and Cainite society

• **London (Londinium):** The walled city of London rests on the site of the Roman town on the north bank of the Thames. With a population of 50,000 mortal souls, London supports the largest Cainite population in the British Isles. The Tower of London guards the eastern approaches to the city while six gates — Aldgate, Aldersgate, Bishopsgate, Cripplegate, Ludgate and Newgate — and London Bridge provide access to the city. Many satellite towns exist outside the city walls, both north and south of the river. The city is a major trade center and port,

AND DID THOSE FEET...

The Roman empire converted to Christianity in AD 312, but numerous stories and legends refer to the arrival of Christianity in the British Isles. The most widely believed is the tale of the missionaries Phagan and Deruvian, claimed to have been the first missionaries sent to the British Isles in AD 167. Their story pales in significance, however, compared to a story that is the most enduring of British myths, after tales of Arthur.

Some claim that Joseph of Arimathea — a minor Biblical figure in whose tomb Jesus lay after the crucifixion — arrived in Britain at Glastonbury. The story goes that Joseph planted his staff at Glastonbury, which grew into the thorn tree that is still visible near the abbey, and that this action prompted the construction of a rude church on the site, 600 years before the founding of Glastonbury Abbey (in AD 670). No reliable evidence supports the story — no written records survive, and no Cainite admits witnessing the events — but the story has seized the popular imagination. Indeed, a further elaboration of the story claims that Christ himself may have accompanied Joseph to Glastonbury on a trip during his teenage years. The story seems far-fetched — especially as Glastonbury is also associated with Arthur, allegedly the site of his burial — but thanks to a millennia of worship on the site Glastonbury Abbey is holy ground of intensity unequalled by any religious site in the British Isles.

and visitors from across Britain and Europe can be found on the city's streets. Saint Paul's Cathedral near Ludgate is the most important Christian site in the city, but the *Mithraeum* in Walbrook is the center of Mithras's cult.

The prince's court is in Faringdon near Ludgate at Saint Paul's cathedral, within the city walls and midway between the Tower and Westminster Palace, the centers of mortal power. The purely functional court lacks the opulence of its French and German equivalents, prompting many Toreador to decry it as "uncivilized." Nonetheless, it makes an efficient heart of Cainite government for both the fief and the Baronies of Avalon. Other sites in the western half of the city (notably the magnificent cathedral and the homes of the nobility) are more to the Toreador's tastes. The eastern half of the city is more commercial and home to lesser mortals, making it a more attractive hunting ground for the Low Clans. The Nosferatu Richard de Worde serves as the unofficial governor of the eastern districts, enforcing the Blood Laws and maintaining order among the Cainite inhabitants. The docks that line the Thames are particularly attractive to the Nosferatu, as are the remains of the Roman sewer system. The Promethean Nosferatu known as Ragged Jenny dominates the underworld of the city and operates a school for mortal and



Cainite footpads. Seen as little more than a petty criminal by de Worde, Jenny's influence in fact rivals his own and extends across Europe.

The Tower of London remains an enigma to the city's Cainites. First constructed by William the Conqueror, it has expanded considerably and would make a logical base of operations for the Cainites. Attempts to establish a haven in the fortress, however, have come to naught. A dark and monstrous presence drives out would-be occupiers — or scatters their remains. Rumors circulate that this presence might in fact be a Lupine, but most Cainites disregard such stories. Lupines don't live in cities, after all.

- **Saint Albans (Verulamium):** The abbey of Saint Alban, the first English martyr, is most notable as the home of Brother John, Benedictine librarian and member of the Cainite Promethean cult. Less blatant than many of his fellow sect-members, Brother John nonetheless plays a substantial role in the Promethean's operations in England. Although he is not a member of the Cainite Heresy, the Toreador scholar has extensive contacts among their English strongholds of the cult in Norwich and Canterbury, as well as further afield.

Winchester (Glastonbury)

The Fief of Winchester claims to be the oldest in England, predating even London as a center of Cainite activity. It is roughly analogous to the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex and originally centered on the western

Roman town of Bath (Aquae Sulis) and the settlement at Glastonbury (Ynas Witrin). The growing influence of Winchester in mortal society made it an alternative seat of power, and the baronial seat officially transferred there in 1214. The fief contains a number of mystical sites (notably Stonehenge, Avebury, Silbury Hill, The White Horse of Uffington and the Cerne Giant). Despite Meerlinda's withdrawal to Durham, the fief contains a number of Tremere, holdovers from before the War of Tor who seek to use these sites for their own ends. The barrows of Salisbury Plain are home to several Cainites following the Road of Heaven who see it as their duty to protect the holy sites, and those Cainites delight in misleading the Tremere by pretending to be spirits or by leading them into Lupine-dens. The most notable of these is the Nosferatu Verica, called by some the "Ghost of the Stones," who resides most often at West Kennet, overlooking Silbury Hill, despite the presence of many Lupines in the area.

- **Winchester (Venta):** A major ecclesiastical and governmental center, Winchester is the site of the Royal Treasury and a mint, though its power is waning due to the centralization of power in Westminster near London. The political situation in Winchester is in flux, the Toreador Melusine having recently seized control of the fief from Roger FitzWilliam. The old baron has not been seen since 1227, though his exact fate is unknown. "Queen" Melusine has replaced many of Baron Roger's Norman Ventrue vassals with her own Poitevin and Angevin followers. She has also given tacit approval to the activities of the Tremere within her fief, much to Mithras's anger.

• **Glastonbury (Ynas Witrin):** The Isle of Glass is an enigma to many Cainites, as it is a potent center of magic and religion that also seems important to the fae. The greedy actions of the Tremere have shattered a tacit truce between Cainites and other beings on the Isle, and the vampire population has been greatly reduced over the last century. The most notable Cainites remaining in Ynas Witrin are the pagan Nosferatu Caradoc who lairs in the surrounding marshes, and Michel du Bois, a Toreador monk resident in the abbey despite its aura of faith.

York

After Winchester, York is the main center of resistance to Mithras's rule, although there has yet to be an open rebellion against the prince. Spanning the county of Yorkshire and the Palatinate of Durham, the Fief of Yorkshire is one of the largest in Avalon. Unfortunately, it also encompasses some of the most rugged terrain in England, much of which is inhospitable to Cainites. The Pennine Hills that form the western part of the fief are home to herds of Lupines, and the moorlands between Whitby and Malton are only marginally less dangerous. Nonetheless, the Baron of York wields immense power thanks to his influence with the Archbishop of York and the Prince-Bishop of Durham, and his reach extends into the neighboring fiefs of Lincoln and Carlisle prompting a number of disputes with the other barons. Baron John has an intense dislike of Mithras and is secretly gathering support among other Cainites for a move against the prince. He would like to take lordship of England for himself, but he would settle for an independent domain of York if the opportunity arose to break away from London.

• **York (Eboracum):** A major center for the Romans (as Eboracum) and Vikings (as Jorvik), York briefly served as the capital of the Roman Empire. A port-city and trade hub on the River Ouse, it has strong ties to the continent, including to Rome thanks to its status as an archbishopric and provincial seat. John, the Ventrue Baron of York, holds court in York Castle but also has agents in Saint Mary's Abbey. Authoritarian and unsmiling, Walter de Gray, the Archbishop, is an ideal pawn for the baron though Aimery de Methuin has also sought to manipulate the archbishop and claims credit for developments to York Minster. The *einherjar* Eyolf Ivarsson serves as Baron John's warlord, and he can usually be found leading nocturnal raids against Lincoln or Chester.

• **Durham:** An alliance between the Bishop of Durham and the Earl of Northumbria created the Palatinate of Durham, a largely independent county. Both spiritual and secular power lies with the prince-bishop who resides in the castle high above a loop in the River Wear. The castle is also home to Eloise Marchand, Baron John's main representative in the Palatinate. The Cathedral of Saint Cuthbert lies at the heart of the walled town and is Durham's principal Elysium. It is here that Lady Eloise occasionally meets with Meerlinda of the Tremere whose Lion's Gate

Chantry stands near the Milburngate bridge. More detail on Lion's Gate can be found in **House of Tremere**.

Canterbury

Canterbury is the heart of the Church in England, and by extension it is one of the principal centers of the Cainite Heresy in Britain. The Toreador "Archbishop" Adrian is responsible for the Heresy's churches in the Province of Canterbury though "Deacon" Aelfred of Norwich has challenged Adrian's authority in this matter on behalf of his overlord, Ranulph Longsword of Bordeaux, who is responsible for England and its holdings overseas. Adrian resents this arrangement and has repeatedly sought to persuade the Crimson Curia to name him the overseer of the Heresy in England. He has risked Mithras's wrath by seeking to steer the king to support the Albigenian Crusade against the Cathars of Provence, which he believes will undermine Ranulph's position and clear his own path to primacy in the British Isles.

• **Canterbury:** Founded by St Augustine, the monastery at Canterbury has long been the heart of the Christian faith in England. The cathedral was the site of Thomas Becket's martyrdom, and the Ambient Faith of the Cathedral is now such that most of the Toreador Heretics present in the city prefer to reside in Saint Augustine's Abbey outside the city walls rather than the Cathedral or Christ Church Priory. Only Archbishop Adrian (who in fact witnessed Becket's murder) resides permanently in the town, his haven and the baronial church sitting adjacent to the Cathedral.

• **Dover:** The castle and town of Dover guards the principal crossing point from France into England and is the haven for a number of Cainites. Led by "Sheriff" James Mannerly and answering directly to Mithras, these Cainites operate independently of the baron, something Archbishop Adrian resents. Adding insult to injury, Mannerly is a priest in the Cult of Mithras and has taken a hard line against members of the Cainite Heresy crossing from the continent. The baron has twice called on Mithras to respect his rights vis-à-vis the fief and is now plotting more direct action against the sheriff.

Carlisle

The most northerly of the English fiefs, Carlisle is responsible for a broad swath of land between the Irish Sea and North Sea along the Scottish border. Though he cares little for the mortal armies that move back and forth across his fief, the Brujah Baron Nathaniel has resisted efforts by John of York and Robert of Lothian to expand their holdings at his expense. He believes Mithras could do more to curb the adventurism of his neighbors and feels that the prince is weak and ineffectual. The large number of Mithraic cults in the fief hold Nathaniel's thoughts of rebellion in check, but if he could circumvent their influence, he might seek to break free of the Court of Avalon

and join the Scots in a new northern British association. In recent years, his court has become home to many younger and more rebellious Cainites, increasing his power base but also causing internal problems with their fractiousness. De Worde has used this disorder to place his own agents in Nathaniel's inner circle.

- **Lindisfarne:** Simply called Holy Island by many, Lindisfarne was once the seat of the See of Durham, but it lost much of its influence and wealth after the Viking raids of the eighth and ninth centuries. A small monastic community remains on the Island, including a Salubri by the name of Matthew who was once a great warrior in Outremer, but fled after some horrific revelation. He now haunts Lindisfarne, but to what purpose no one knows. The Tremere of Durham have heard rumors of Matthew's presence, but expeditions to Lindisfarne have met with little success so far.

Chester

The Palatinate County of Chester stands outside the king's authority and forms the core of the Fief of Chester, the bulwark of Mithras's defenses against the feral Cainites of Wales. Baron Marcus Verus was a legionnaire with the Valeria Victrix Embraced by Mithras in the second century. Marcus is a senior member of the Cult of Mithras, and he has inducted a number of Cainites and mortals into the faith. These warriors serve as his deputies and representatives along the border with Powys and Gwynedd, as well as his eyes, ears and sword-arm in the numerous forts from Rhuddlan to Ludlow. The baron is gruff and authoritarian, but he is a superlative warrior and battlefield commander, his thousand years of experience giving him unprecedented insights into the art of war. Marcus is generally unimpressed with the quality of the Welsh troops, and he relies on Eyolf Ivarsson's raids from the Fief of York to, in his own words, "keep me amused." The baron is less blasé about rumors of a coven of Setite Black Magdelane heretics in his fief — he despises the Setites but has yet to track them down (see page 45 of **Cainite Heresy** for more details of the Black Magdelanes).

- **Chester (Deva):** Founded in Roman times, the small town of Chester is seat of the Palatinate and a major trading center, though its role as a port has dwindled in recent years. Only three Cainites reside in the town permanently — Baron Marcus and his aides — but there is a large transitory population of those seeking the Roman baron's patronage and knowledge.

- **Shrewsbury:** A major center for trade with Powys, situated in a loop in the Severn River, walls were built around Shrewsbury in 1220 to defend against Welsh marauders. The Brujah Richard ap Llewelyn serves as Baron Marcus's seneschal for Shrewsbury, though rumors abound that his loyalties lie more with Daffyd of Meifod than with his baron.

Exeter

The southwest counties of England, Devon and Cornwall, are rugged and sparsely populated. The people are distinct from the other English, retaining much of their British heritage including a language related to that of Wales, Ireland and Brittany. The land is rich in resources, notably tin which is a major source of revenue for the crown. The Cainite population of Exeter is largely restricted to the coastal regions, particularly around Exeter, as the inland moorlands are home to both Lupines and fae. Gangrel are the most numerous clan in the fief, many enjoying the wild countryside despite the danger posed by Lupines. Conflict with the werewolves is actually less frequent here than it is in other parts of the isles, and while the local Cainites don't understand this, they don't question it, either. In the heart of the moors, notably near the rugged tors, a vampire would find no such mercy, and such "trespassers" usually don't survive to regret entering.

- **Exeter (Isca):** Exeter has been an important port since Roman times, with vessels journeying to Brittany and Aquitaine. Baron Hugh has built up a solid working relationship with both Baron Gerard of Bordeaux and Warren of Dinan, though his seneschal, the Malkavian Peter de Kennet, often oversees routine matters in the city.

- **Tintagel:** The legendary birthplace of King Arthur is now the site of a new castle built by the current king's younger brother, Richard, who forced Henry to make him Earl of Cornwall in 1227. Several Cainites visit the castle, notably Rhun de Tintagel and the Gangrel bard Rhianon, while the passage known as Merlin's Cave provides shelter for a pair of itinerant Nosferatu who travel up and down the coast of Devon and Cornwall.

- **Lyonesse:** Beyond the westernmost point of Cornwall lies a cluster of islands that several Cainites claim was the legendary kingdom of Lyonesse. Rumors of unearthly treasures draw Cainite adventurers to the isles, and while the islands boast numerous chambers in which to lair, the vampires find little vitae to support them and even less to protect them from the fae.

Gloucester

Like many of the mortal baronies of the region, the Fief of Gloucester spans the Severn River and incorporates the lands of southern Wales as far as Pembroke. The mortal rulers of these lands are largely Norman colonists, though Prince Llywelyn of Gwynedd has recently gained considerable influence in the lands around the Gower. The most powerful mortals in the fief are members of the de Clare family, who hold power as lords of Glamorgan, Hereford and Gloucester and who also have substantial holdings in Ireland. The de Clares are related by marriage to the Marshal family whose lord, William the Younger, is Earl of Pembroke, Lord of Leinster and Marshal of England.

Baroness Seren leads the fief, the only Malkavian to hold such a high post in the Baronies of Avalon. Seren is suspicious of outsiders (and many of her own vassals),

believing them jealous of her power and success, also driven to fits of manic activity broken with periods of deep melancholy. Nonetheless, she is a charismatic and inspirational leader and formidable administrator. The Cainites of the fief and even those further afield acknowledge her capabilities as a governor, the lands of Glamorgan being the only civilized fief in Wales. To check her more erratic behavior, Mithras has bound the baroness with the blood oath and set several agents to watch over her court. He changes those agents every year or so just to make sure they aren't succumbing to the madness that often surrounds the Malkavians, and serving a turn in Gloucester is often looked on as what happens to Cainites who annoy Prince Mithras.

- **Bristol:** Bristol is a major port, and trade with Ireland and Aquitaine is a major source of wealth. The baroness often resides in the well-defended city where she can more easily "greet" traveling Cainites. Baron Gerard has complained to Mithras about Seren's obstruction of his representatives, but the Malkavian has avoided serious rebukes from the prince thus far.

- **Gloucester:** The fief's official capital controls a major crossing point of the Severn and is an important trade center. Although the baroness spends several months in residence, her seneschal, John FitzStephen, oversees nightly operations.

- **Saint Davids:** At the western tip of Pembrokeshire, Saint Davids is the preeminent Christian site in Wales. It is home to Nennius, the only member of the Cainite Heresy in the region. The Toreador has sought to expand his influence but has been blocked by the Ventrue who have no desire for additional challenges in an already troublesome region.

- **Oxford:** Oxford is a major center for trade, but it is best known as a place of learning, the site of a university (founded in 1168) that grew out of the bishop's courts in the town. The Cappadocian Alfonse di Padua serves as Cainite lord of the town, but the scholar Nicholas of Clan Brujah contests this right.

Lincoln

The Fief of Lincoln dominates the eastern Midlands but is hard pressed by its neighbors. Baron Stephen wields considerable political influence but his military power is stretched by the needs of his fief, making it difficult for him to counter the actions of his neighbors. He also faces a major problem with rebellious neonates, the actions of Brujah outlaws near Newark encouraging a number of young Cainites to emulate them. Some parts of Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire are in anarchy and John of York has used this to expand his influence into northern Nottinghamshire. Stephen is planning a countermove, marshalling forces at Newark, but fears Mithras will intervene before he can reverse the situation.

- **Lincoln (Lindom Colonia):** Founded by retiring Roman soldiers, Lincoln sits at the top of an escarpment

overlooking the River Witham. It is an important trade center with a major castle guarding both the town and the cathedral (the second largest in the country and home to one of the original copies of the Magna Carta). Known as the Bail, this fortified enclosure also houses Baron Stephen's court while Lucius, the Lasombra legate of the Crimson Curia, resides in the Bishop's Palace. Lucius's presence is ostensibly to oversee work on the cathedral after the earthquake of 1185 but is also seeking to mediate between the Cainite Deacon of Norwich and the other prelates of the Cainite Heresy, particularly regarding the Isle of Ely. Lucius used his influence to speed work on the cathedral but this has disastrous results in 1237 when the central tower collapses.

- **Nottinghamshire:** Nottinghamshire typifies the troubles of the Fief of Lincoln, different sections of the divided town continuously at odds with each other. Norman Cainites — mainly Ventrue and Toreador — reside in the castle on its rocky promontory on the west side of the River Lean. Those of Saxon or Danish descent, a mix of Ventrue, Gangrel and Brujah, reside in the Saxon burgh on the eastern side of the stream, only grudgingly working with their supposed overlords and frequently lending covert support to the rebels. The town has a population of Nosferatu who lair in the sandstone caves that pervade the rocks under both Norman and Saxon areas, feeding on and protecting the mortals who live in the caves. The Nosferatu claim the fens of Broad Marsh between the town and the River Trent as their hunting grounds, and they exact tolls from any Cainite who seeks to cross the river.

Norwich

The flat lands of East Anglia — Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridge and Huntingdon — are unremarkable, offering rich farmland and fishing. The fief is currently without a leader since Baron Michael was slain in 1227. His murderer, a Brujah named Hewald, was tracked down and slain, but it is widely suspected that he was merely a cat's-paw for another as-yet-unidentified Cainite. Rumors abound of everything from neonate anarchists to a Setite takeover or a Baali war party. As a consequence, paranoia pervades the fief, with Cainites suspecting each other of involvement in the slaying. Mithras has yet to name a successor to the fief but currently the most powerful Cainite in the region is Deacon Aelfred of Norwich. It seems unlikely that the deacon will succeed to the position of baron, however, as he has used his position in the Church and the Cainite Heresy to foil Mithras's plans in the past.

- **Norwich:** The royal castle of Norwich is the seat of Roger le Bigod, the young Duke of Norfolk and brother-in-law of King Alexander II of Scotland. The priory attached to the cathedral is one of the largest centers of the Cainite Heresy in England, rivaled only by Canterbury.

- **Bishop's Lynn:** The port of Bishop's Lynn serves much of Eastern England and is a major mercantile cen-

ter. The Ventrue Jasper de Mobrey declared the town his domain in 1203, but Baron Michael never confirmed the claim. De Mobrey has extensive contacts with the Ventrue of the Low Countries and northern Germany.

- **Ely:** The Isle of Ely, situated in the Fens, lies on the border of the Fiefs of Lincoln and Norwich and is the subject of a dispute between the two baronies. Traditionally, the cathedral and priory have fallen under the authority of Norwich, but Baron Stephen has challenged this, and with the death of Baron Michael has petitioned the prince for an adjustment of fief boundaries.

- **Cambridge:** Once known only as a port and trade center, Cambridge has become England's second university town after a number of masters arrived from Oxford in 1209. This school has attracted a number of Cainites, though there is not yet any hierarchy in the town.

Wales

Wales is a harsh and divided land whose inhabitants are as often at odds with each other as with outsiders. Power rests in a collection of minor kingdoms whose authority has waxed and waned over the years. Save in the south, the population is largely of British descent, their Celtic ancestors of British and Irish ancestry, though the lands of Pembroke and Gwynedd have some Scandinavian heritage. The Welsh relationship with England, both in Saxon times and the present Norman rule, has been antagonistic. Like the mortal population, the vampires of Wales are descended from the original inhabitants of Britain, and they include some of the oldest and most powerful Cainites of the Isles.

The Importance of Family

The kin-group is central to life in Wales, and families and extended relationships are inextricably linked to political power and land holdings. Lineage determines who can and cannot inherit property, and land is often divided among all the sons rather than being passed to a single heir. This system frequently leads to infighting to remove rival claimants, lest the landholdings rapidly diminish in size. Even so, the kingdoms are fragmented, containing large numbers of often-antagonistic groups.

Marriage is important to the family groups, binding different kin together in alliances, and the extended family cares for its widowed and orphaned members. The family group is responsible for policing the actions of its members, standing in judgment over any of its members accused of a crime and/or defending them against outside claims. Arguments over justice frequently lead to blood feuds between opposing families. Norman law is steadily gaining hold in the south, and manorial lords are seeking a greater role in the justice of their lands.

This emphasis on family has allowed Lupines to prosper in Wales, as werewolves build long-term (if incomprehensible) relationships with particular families. A Cainite seeking to Embrace someone from a Welsh family had best watch his choice for a suitable length of time to make sure that his prospective childe is not already claimed.

The Kingdoms

The rich, low-lying lands of the south have come under the domination of Norman barons who operate largely independently of King Henry. The rest of Wales forms the following three principalities: Deheubarth in the south whose lands formerly included the English holdings; Powys in the hills of mid-Wales; and Gwynedd in the mountains and lowlands of the north. Prince Llywelyn Fawr ap Iorworth of Gwynedd is the nominal overlord of Wales, and the kings of Powys and Deheubarth pay him homage. In turn, however, he acknowledges the English king as his master, although he is currently testing young Henry's limits. The Marcher lords of Chester and Gloucester are the only Cainite authorities in Wales. This is due in part to the scattered population of kine, which makes gatherings of Cainites impractical, but many of the inhabitants are simply too independent, using their immense powers to defend their territories against interlopers.

Deheubarth

The kingdom of Deheubarth (the "southern lands" in Welsh) is hard pressed by the Norman interlopers, and its future looks bleak. King Owain ap Gruffydd rules the land from his fortress at Dinef, but this land is now under threat from the Norman barony of Pembroke. The Cainites of Deheubarth are subject to the Fief of Gloucester, though some in the northern reaches of the kingdom refuse to acknowledge Baroness Seren's authority. The most notable such malcontent is the Brujah Rhys of Tregaron who has left the last two Gloucester emissaries staked on the edge of his domain.

Gwynedd

The most northerly kingdom of Wales, Gwynedd is also the most powerful. The influence of its ruler, Prince Llywelyn Fawr, extends into Powys and Deheubarth, and he serves as nominal overlord of all Wales. Llywelyn has strong ties to both the marcher lords and the English crown (his wife is King Henry's half-sister) and has checked further encroachment into his lands. Llywelyn's palace at Aberffawr on Anglesey is home to Rhodry ap Geraint ap Mithras, the Ventrue prince's representative in North Wales. Officially, Rhodry is the Cainite overlord of Snowdonia, Llein and the lands bordering the Fief of Chester, but his power extends little beyond Anglesey. Indeed, his efforts to extend his influence toward Powys in the late

12th century almost led to his doom when he encountered the Gangrel Methuselah, Bodhmall. According to his tale, the Methuselah only allowed him to escape “for fondness of that old fool Mithras” with whom she traveled in the days of the Roman Empire.

Although it is less dangerous to Cainites than Powys, Gwynedd is not a safe land for unwary vampires, since most of the inhabitants away from Anglesey care little for the Traditions. Any vampire traveling in the uplands must be prepared to fight or bargain well or else become a meal for the elders’ thirst.

Powys

The hills of mid-Wales form the kingdom of Powys. Until recently, it included two sub-kingdoms, but only the northern section, Powys Fadog, remained independent under Madog ap Gruffydd. The southern regions have been seized by the Marcher lords, notably the de Braose family, or they now fall under the lordship of Llywelyn Fawr. The capital of Madog’s dwindling realm is Mathrafal, about 20 miles west of Shrewsbury, but the center of Cainite power is the Monastery of Meifod several miles away. Daffyd ap Bindusarra of Clan Ventrue is the current Cainite deacon, and he claims to have known Meifod’s founder, Saint Gwyddfarch. Daffyd and Richard ap Llewelyn of Shrewsbury remain in regular contact, and they maintain order in the region between them. The hills of Powys, however, are home to savage beasts that do not take kindly to interlopers. The notable exception to Gangrel and Lupine dominance of the land is the mountain of Cadair Idris, which is home to the Malkavian Idris. Renowned as a seer, Idris uses his powers to discourage intruders. Mortals who spend a night on the mountain often do so at a cost to their sanity.

Scotland

The modern land of Scotland is a fusion of five distinct cultures. The oldest is that of the Picts, the original inhabitants of the land who fought the Legions of Rome to a standstill. The Picts had considerable support from Lupines, but an Irish tribe, the Scots, eventually subjugated them after an apparent civil war among the werewolves. Even before the fall of the Picts, Anglo-Saxon colonists were arriving in the lowlands of Scotland; the Kingdom of Northumbria once incorporated the lands now known as Lothian. Norse raiders likewise came to Scotland, and they remain a major power in the isles of the north and west, though their influence on the mainland is restricted to Caithness. Lastly, many Norman lords have journeyed north to take control of lands in the Lowlands, while several Scottish magnates (including King Alexander) hold lands in England.

Kenneth MacAlpin, who led the Scots to victory against the Picts, is acknowledged as the first King of Scotland, but the modern kingdom didn’t begin to take form until the reign of Malcolm II in the early 11th century. Unfortunately, William I of England forced Malcolm III to acknowledge him as his overlord in 1072, a bond that remained in some form ever since. The Scots haven’t always been loyal — Alexander II’s father, William the Lion, sided with Henry II’s sons in their rebellion — but the current king has substantial landholdings in England and was a signatory of the Magna Carta. Indeed, Alexander is married to King Henry’s sister, though the union has yet to produce children.

Until the fall of the Picts, Scotland was inhospitable to Cainites, since the werewolves posed much the same risks as are found in Ireland. In recent years, however, the number of Lupines appears to have declined and the growth of the Church and Norman civilization has driven the fae into the Highlands. A number of Cainites now call Scotland home, though the majority dwell in the lowlands of Lothian.

The Regions

The lands of Scotland comprise three distinct nations, the Kingdom of Scotland, the Norse Kingdom of Man and the Isles, and the Earldom of Orkney. Scotland itself falls into two broad bands — the “civilized” Lowlands, dominated by Anglo-Norman landholders, and the clan lands of the Highlands.

Lothian and the Borders

Norman and Normanized lords rule the hills of Lothian and the Lowlands of central Scotland, resulting in a land that is little different from northern England. Indeed, the boundary with England is ill defined, though key fortifications such as Berwick and Norham delineate the approximate boundary. Carlisle has occasionally been part of Scotland, and the Cainite Fief of Carlisle incorporates parts of the Cheviot Hills. The Toreador Robert of Edinburgh stands as Baron of Lothian and is a subject of Mithras, but due to the lack of Cainites in the fief, there is little organization.

- **Edinburgh:** The Scottish capital sits on the south coast of the Firth of Forth, its fearsome castle perched atop a rocky crag while the town stretches between the castle and the Abbey of Holyrood. Several Toreador call the city home, but their numbers are placing a strain on the population of the city. A recent victory over the Ventrue of York separated the Scottish Church from the Province of York, and Baron Robert is using this occasion to encourage his clan-mates to disperse among the other towns and settlements of the region.

The Highlands

Although they are technically part of Scotland, the clan holdings of the rugged Highlands are largely independent of Edinburgh. The extended family is the main social organization, essentially tribal in nature. Norman feudalism has yet to take hold, but strong bonds of loyalty join the members of each clan. Music and stories are central to the Highland life, and the post of *seanachaidh* or storyteller/historian is highly regarded. The Highlanders speak Gaelic, and although they are Christian (and despite the Synod of Whitby) their church follows the Celtic model.

The forests and hills are home to many unearthly beings, none of whom take kindly to trespassers. Only the Gangrel have had any success among the mountains and lochs, though a number of Toreador and the occasional Cappadocian have attempted to lurk among the clans and study their oral traditions.

- **The Castle in the Lake:** Loch Treig, on the western flank of Ben Nevis, is the site of the Castle in the Lake, the home castle of the Order of the Bitter Ashes. The Order spans Europe and has a host of lesser bases, but this submerged fortress is the heart of the order and — according to Cainite legend — the resting place of the Holy Grail. For more details on the castle and the Order see **The Ashen Knight**.

The Isles

The Norse Earldom of Orkney and Shetland is known as the Nordreys by its inhabitants, and it also incorporates

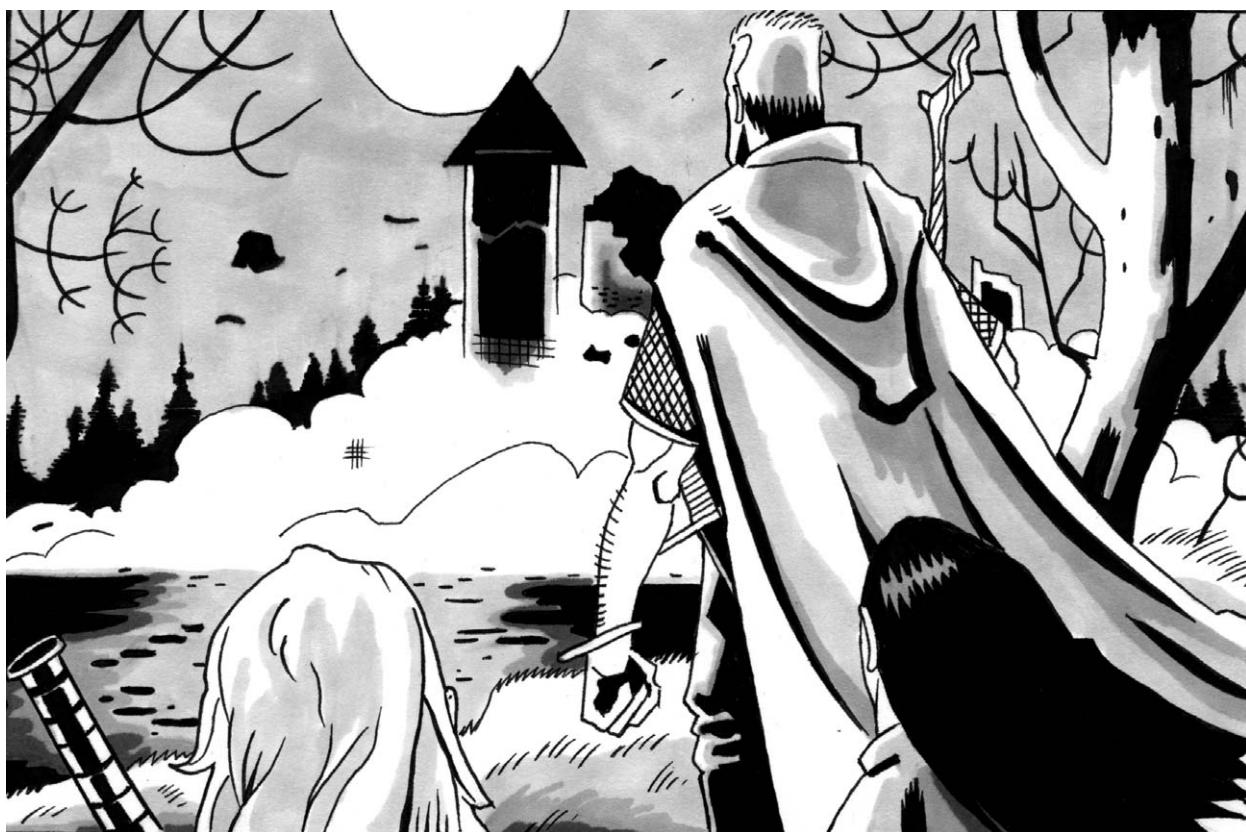
holdings on the mainland in Caithness. Jan Haraldson has ruled the Earldom since 1214, and he pays homage to the King of Norway. Few Cainites call the bleak Nordreys home, and those who do are *einherjar*, visiting in the long dark winters. The Isles are home to fae and magi who exploit the magic of sites like the Ring of Brodgar.

The western isles of the Hebrides and Man form the Kingdom of Man and the Isles, though holdings in Ireland were lost to the Irish and Normans. Politics in the Kingdom are ever shifting, and King Olaf II is faced with a constant battle to retain power. Like the Nordreys, the terrain of Man and the Isles is hostile to Cainite existence, but a group of the Faithful manages to eke out an existence on the holy island of Iona.

Ireland

The divided lands of Ireland are the last stronghold of Celtic culture. Never invaded by the Romans, the ancient customs and traditions have remained strong and the island has become a bastion for supernatural entities. Cainites are a relatively new presence in Ireland, and they are generally unwelcome.

Ireland converted to Christianity in AD 432, later than the Roman Empire, but it remained Christian while many of the Roman lands fell back into paganism. Irish monks preserved much of the old knowledge, and it was missionaries from Ireland who first brought the word of Christ back to the Britain. Like the Scottish Highlands, the people of Ireland are tribal in nature with extended



families banding together as a Tuath (clan). The four traditional Irish kingdoms — Ulster, Leinster, Connacht and Munster — formed from associations of Tuath, but the modern situation is more fragmented. Now, minor territories such as Desmond, Thomond and Ossory exist in place of the traditional kingdoms. The kingdoms and Tuath have traditionally fought amongst themselves, but the post of *Ard-ri* — High King — existed to settle disputes.

A number of Britons fled to Ireland after the fall of Rome, but the first serious assault on the kingdom came from Viking bands. These raiders were lured by the wealth of Irish monasteries, and they eventually became lords of several coastal cities including Dublin and Cork. These raiders are often credited with introducing the first Cainites to Ireland, though some fae supposedly claim that a group of “well behaved” vampires has dwelled there since before Rome came to Britain. *Ard-ri* Brian Boru, who united several of the kingdoms against the invaders, eventually broke the Norse power, but his Pyrrhic victory merely postponed Ireland’s troubles. In 1166, the King of Leinster fled into exile but returned a year later with troops of the King of England and led by Richard de Clare, sometimes called “Strongbow,” Earl of Pembroke. With the Norman invaders came Cainites, and further Cainite colonists accompanied later expeditions, particularly Toreador drawn by tales of Irish artistry and storytelling.

The Two Lands

Ireland is not a pleasant land for Cainites, who are often forced to fight for their very survival against the full might of the fae and rampaging Lupines, the battles often taking place under the cover of the frequent battles between the Irish and Normans. Furthermore, the Cainites fight among themselves, the older Irish and Danish Cainites resenting the arrival of their Norman kin. The Cainites have attempted to divide Ireland into its four traditional kingdoms, but their small numbers have made doing so impractical. Like their mortal associates, therefore, they usually refer simply to The Pale (the Anglo-Norman lands) and Beyond the Pale (the Irish lands). This boundary is artificial in both the mortal and the Cainite world, and Norman and Cainite influence extends little beyond the Norman-held towns and the castles of the invaders.

The Pale

The lands under King Henry’s lordship, the Pale, dominate the south and east of the country, stretching from Dublin to Cork. In some areas, principally those previously dominated by the Vikings, the Norman barons are regarded as nothing more than another set of overlords, while they are challenged at every step by the natives in others. Walter de Lacey and William Marshall dominate Norman affairs in the eastern and central regions, but Irish magnates predominate elsewhere in the county, albeit often sworn to Henry.

Cainites have an even more difficult time, since Lupines challenge their presence even within the Pale.

Only in the cities — Dublin, Waterford and Cork — do vampires have a modicum of protection, as their foes dislike the urban landscape. The Pale boasts no Cainite baron. The independent Ventrue lordships are beholden directly to Prince Mithras, which has given the lords freedom to act as they see fit but has also hampered broader Cainite cooperation within the Pale as each city lord looks to his own interests first.

- **Dublin:** Dublin is the heart of the Pale and the capital of the Norman colony. It is also home to the principal Cainite presence in Ireland, the Toreador playing a major role in the construction of Saint Patrick’s Cathedral. The Ventrue Edward de Warene stands as lord of the city, but the Toreador “bishop” William Rufus has recently challenged his authority. Only William’s ties to Adrian of Canterbury have spared him the lord’s wrath. The Brujah James O’Conlae is also active in the city on behalf of the Prometheans, though he frequently travels to England and the continent.

- **Cork:** Cork is a city under siege. The surrounding lands are subject to Irish raids by day and to the depredations of Lupines by night. The Cainite Lord Hector has struggled to defend the vampiric presence in the city and several younger Cainites look set to oust the old warrior.

Beyond the Pale

English colonists are not welcome beyond the Pale, and the situation is even worse for the Children of Caine. Some Toreador exploit the legend of the leanhaun sidhe — the muse of poets — to hide their presence among mortals. Some of the fae look on this deceit with amusement and leave the Cainites alone, but this slur on their kind offends others. Only the Lhiannan have any degree of safety beyond the Pale, since their links to the old Celtic traditions earn them a modicum of respect. Magda, the Witch of Connacht (and one of the few Lhiannan to openly admit her lineage), is the dominant vampire in the northwest. Several Gangrel have sought to slay her, but she has survived thus far thanks to a combination of her arcane powers and superb knowledge of the terrain.

The Duchy of Aquitaine

The lands of southwestern France are dichotomous, both for the mortal Angevin rulers and the Cainites of the Court of Avalon. Officially, the lands of Aquitaine are holdings of Henry III as Duke of Aquitaine via his grandmother, Eleanor, but his overlord, Louis of France, has sought to eliminate the young king’s influence in the area. Central to Louis’s strategy is Hugh of Lusignan, King Henry’s stepfather, who holds Angouleme in lieu of his wife, Isabella. In 1224, Louis persuaded Hugh to side with the French forces in their unexpected attack on Poitou. This assault netted Louis control of Poitou, in particular Poitiers and the port city of Limoges. Yet even though

Hugh led Louis's troops through Gascony, he failed to gain control of Bordeaux and Bayonne, providing Henry a base from which to regain control of his holdings. Bound to England by trade (notably wine), the port-cities of Aquitaine have largely remained loyal to the Angevins, while the rural regions do not see the worth of a foreign master and would prefer a French overlord. The port city of La Rochelle, whose rulers offended the local population, is a notable exception. The city sided with the French, and its loss was a major blow to Henry's plans to regain his lost holdings. Despite two assaults, the matter remains unresolved until the Treaty of Paris in 1259.

Even though he is not particularly interested in Aquitaine, Prince Mithras recognizes the hand of Salianna in the recent turn of events, exploiting the mortal situation to denude the position of his own agents and strengthen her own. Mortal and Cainite authorities in Poitou are now more closely aligned, as King Etienne's Court of Love in Poitiers answers solely to France and the Courts of Love rather than having to acknowledge the "barbaric" Baronies of Avalon. Mithras has directed the Baron of Bordeaux, Gerard le Vieux, to strengthen his information-gathering activities among mortals and Cainites. Mithras is not concerned about the balance of power in the fief, but he comprehends the economic effect that losing Bordeaux would have on ports such as Bristol and Exeter.

The Fiefs of Aquitaine

The lands that Eleanor of Aquitaine brought into the Angevin Empire comprise three distinct regions. The northernmost element is the County of Poitou, dominated by the city of Poitiers, the ducal seat and the port city of La Rochelle. Further south is the Duchy of Aquitaine itself, comprised principally of Angoulême, Auvergne, Marche, Perigord and Saintonge. The southernmost element is the Duchy of Gascony, incorporating the counties of Bordeaux, Dax and Armagnac. Poitou has been removed from Henry's control, and with it large elements of Aquitaine.

Although it has never been particularly clear, the Cainite situation has been exacerbated by the French action. Bordeaux remains firmly under Mithras's jurisdiction, as does Bayonne and towns on the Garonne and Dordogne rivers. Further afield, however, Avalon's grip diminishes, with the lands falling under the influence of the courts of Poitiers or Carcassonne.

Duchy of Gascony (County of Bordeaux)

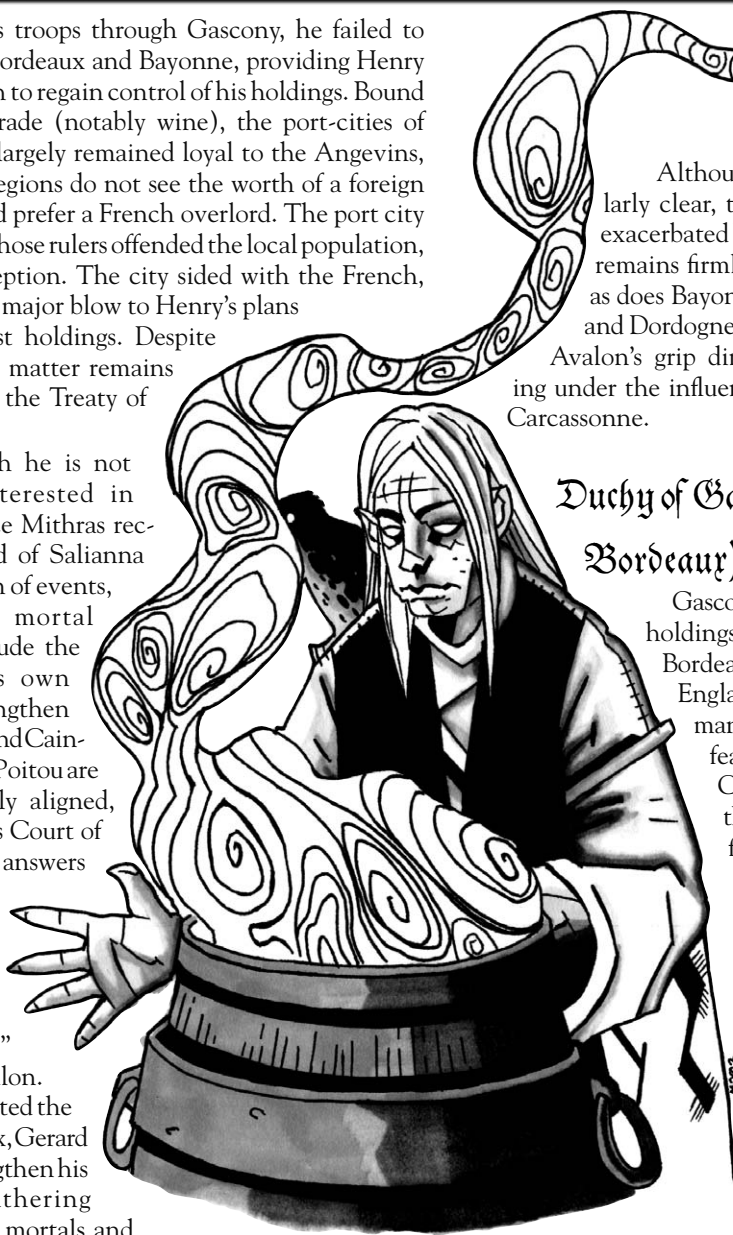
Gascony is the heart of Henry's French holdings, centered on the port city of Bordeaux and economically tied to England. Since the events of 1224, many Gascon Cainites have sworn fealty to Baron Gerard and the Court of Avalon, declaring that they are loyal vassals rather than faithless oath-breakers like the Poitevins.

- **Bordeaux:** Founded by Romans over 1500 years ago, Bordeaux is best known for its wines, but it is also a major trade center. Mithras's representative, Baron Gerard le Viex, holds court in a well-appointed manor overlooking the Garonne. His principal rival is Ranulf Longsword, the Crimson Curia's overseer for Aquitaine and the British Isles, whose influence in Aquitaine is more far-reaching (if less comprehensive) than the baron's. The Cathédral St-Andre is a focal point for the Cainite Heresy, and it serves as Ranulph's haven when he is in the city.

Aquitaine

The Duchy of Aquitaine is the main point of conflict between France and England, as well as between Avalon and the Grand Court. Hugh de Lusignan holds the counties of Angoulême and Manche, while Auvergne and Perigord are likewise aligned with Louis. Members of the Baronies of Avalon remain active in the region, however, and both Angoulême and Perigord are the sites of frequent clashes between members of the two courts.

- **Cahors:** A major center for wine production, Cahors sits astride the River Lot. The Cathedral of Saint Etienne



in the town is the principal haven for Toreador Bishop Ranulph Longsword. From here, the bishop's influence extends across southern France with notable centers in Agen, Bordeaux and St-Yreix-la-Perche. Ranulph has strong ties to Toulouse, but he has avoided the county since the start of the Albigenian Crusade.

Notable Cainites

Mithras, Prince of London

4th-generation Ventrue, childe of Veddatha, walker on the Road of Kings

Nature: Innovator

Demeanor: Autocrat

Embrace: 1258 BC

Apparent Age: mid 20s

As soldier in life, Mithras received the Embrace in 1258 BC and established himself as the living "war god" of various peoples. As the Lord of Light, he was seen as the bringer of civilization and morality, who spent his days guiding the sun through the heavens and thus only appeared at night. By the century before Christ, his cult was well established in Rome, although he himself was beset by rivals immersed in the convoluted politics of the empire.

The expansion of the empire drew Mithras to Britain, where his cult flourished among the soldiers of the frontier province, and he quickly became one of the principal Cainite lords of the land. He then decided to enter torpor as the lands under his sway fell into barbarism. He slept fitfully but did not reawaken fully until the years after the Norman Conquest, waking to find that the despised "shepherd's cult" (as he called Christianity) had grown beyond his wildest fears and subsumed many of the aspects of his religion.

Attempts to rebuild his cult and influence initially met stiff resistance from other Cainites, but through subterfuge and manipulation, he was able to clear his path to power. He was eventually accepted as the lord of the Baronies of Avalon as mortal society stabilized under Henry II. His age, power and charisma allowed him to dominate an unprecedented area, roughly analogous to the Angevin Empire but strongest in England, which he manipulates with the subtlety and cynicism of a master.

Melusine d'Anjou, "Queen" of Winchester

7th-generation Toreador, childe of Charles of Poitiers, walker on the Road of Kings

Nature: Survivor



Demeanor: Caretaker

Embrace: AD 865

Apparent Age: mid 20s

Angevin legend tells of a beautiful woman who married the Duke of Anjou and bore his children but who could not abide to enter the church at Lusignan, and fled screaming when forced to do so. By some tales, this Melusine was a fairy, in others a dragon or demon. The Cainite who goes by the name Melusine claims that she is the progenitor of the myth, but that she was a ghoul of Clan Toreador at that time and was later Embraced into the clan. The veracity of this claim has never been proven but any who challenge Melusine's claim have found themselves victims of her far-reaching influence and sharp temper.

Entering the political limelight in the late 10th century, she established herself as the preeminent power in Anjou and expanded her influence into Aquitaine and surrounding counties with the marriage of Eleanor of Aquitaine to Henry of Anjou. She resisted outside influence for many years and only accepted Mithras's regency in 1175. The implosion of the Angevin Empire under John's rule also sundered the Cainite holdings and Melusine found her lands overwhelmed by those loyal to the Grand Court, prompting her retreat first to Poitiers and then to England. She has come to despise Mithras for what she sees as his abandonment of Avalon's French holdings. She has established Winchester as her base of operations and become the focus of opposition to the prince.





CHAPTER TWO: FRANCE

I pray thee, win the love of the people of thy kingdom. For truly, I would rather that a Scot should come out of Scotland and rule the people of the kingdom well and justly, than that thou shouldst govern them ill-advisedly.

—Advice of Louis IX to his son Philip (later Philip III)

In AD 1230, France is at an apex of its power. The monarchy is safely in the hands of Blanche of Castile, regent for the 16-year-old Louis IX. Under Louis's grandfather, Philippe II Auguste, the French monarchy has transformed from a powerful landholder among several powerful landholders to the pre-eminent power in the region. The English have been all but evicted from the continent. King Henry III's intrigues and campaigns have failed to spark unrest. Of the nine great baronies, only Brittany, Burgundy, Champagne, Flanders and Toulouse are not part of the royal domain.

The major landholders of France are not entirely pleased with the idea of a strong monarch. The former English lands in Normandy and Poitou are restless and not yet reconciled to their French nobles and administrators. Brittany, Champagne and Toulouse in particular have twice already tried to rise against Blanche and Louis. The second rebellion is collapsing in early



MORTALS

Blanche of Castile — Queen-Regent of France, widow of Louis VIII.

Henry III — King of England, covets regaining his family's ancestral lands in France but cautious about invasion.

Hugh le Brun — Count of La Marche, husband of Isabella of Angoulême (King John I of England's widow). Fickle supporter of the French crown and sometimes rebel.

Louis IX — 16-year-old King of France under his mother's regency.

Philippe Hurepel — 24-year-old uncle to Louis IX. Generally loyal to the king, but a foe to Count Thibault IV of Champagne.

Pierre of Dreux, called Mauclerc — Count of Brittany. Attempts to play Louis IX and Henry III against each other for personal power, and fails. Leader of rebellions against Louis and Blanche.

Raymond VII — Count of Toulouse. Recently restored to royal favor and good graces with Church after heretical rebellion in his county and neighboring lands. Sometimes joins in rebellions against Louis and Blanche.

Raymond-Roger IV de Trencavel — Viscount of Carcassonne. Excommunicated rebel leading his forces against the Church's crusaders and friars. Not a Cathar heretic himself, but sympathetic to the Cathars.

Thibault IV le Chansonier — Count of Champagne and noted troubadour. Strong supporter of Blanche although weakly involved in some rebellions. Rumor suggests he was involved in an affair with Blanche and poisoned her husband, King Louis VIII.

CAINITES

Esclarmonde the Black — (7th-generation Toreador) Queen of the Court of Love in Toulouse, based in the Pyrenees. Cathar supporter. Currently besieged by crusaders and suspected of rebellion by Matriarch Salianna.

Etienne — (5th-generation Toreador) King of the Court of Love in Poitou, based in Poitiers. A diplomatic courtier with as many ties to English Cainites as to French.

Eudes de Troyes — (8th-generation Brujah) Guardian of the Champagne Fairs and Promethean who travels with the annual fairs.

Geoffrey — (5th-generation Ventrue). Prince of Paris and head of the Toreador-Ventrue Grand Court since 1222, when he deposed his sire Alexander. Currently trying to prove his leadership and maintain control, while authority slips from the Grand Court to the Courts of Love.

Hélène La Juste — (6th-generation Toreador) Queen of the Court of Love in Champagne, based in Troyes. A supporter of troubadours, poets and writers.

Isouda de Blaise — (7th-generation Toreador) Queen of the Court of Love in Blois, based in Chartres. Justly proud of the recently completed Cathedral of Chartres, which she has sponsored from its earliest days.

Salianna — (5th-generation Toreador) Matriarch of the Courts of Love, based in Paris. Ally to Mithras of London (Ventrue) and Hardestadt of the Fiefs of the Black Cross (Ventrue). Supporter of Geoffrey, current ruler of the Toreador-Ventrue Grand Court in Paris.

Countess Savarre — (Ventrue) Mysterious supporter of Alexander at the Grand Court, currently fleeing from Salianna and Geoffrey. Allied with Queen Esclarmonde. Possesses many valuable secrets of the Grand Court and likely to support any of Alexander's efforts to regain Paris.

"Saint" Regis — (8th-generation Toreador) Prince of Marseilles. A pious and pragmatic ruler in the midst of a struggle between his own followers, the Furores in the city, a group of Ravnos Sybarites, and complex mortal politics.

Véronique d'Orléans — (9th-generation Brujah) Supporter of Geoffrey against Alexander who has her own reasons for trying to maintain the Grand Court as a counterbalance to the Courts of Love. Believed to support Louis IX, and perhaps attempting to drive the Venture out of the royal court.

1230. The young king's hold on his throne is stable, but the boy-king himself will not take the throne for another four years. Nobles are busy conspiring and gossiping about whom Louis will take for a queen.

The most disruptive event of the past three decades, the Albigensian Crusade against heresy in the south of France, seems all but settled. Just last year, Raymond VII, Count of Toulouse, reconciled himself to the Church leaders at Notre-Dame in Paris. Raymond VII also signed a treaty, the Peace of Paris, with the French crown. He agreed to cede many of his lands to Louis IX and pledged the marriage of his daughter, Joan, to Alphonse, one of Louis's brothers. Raymond-Roger IV, heir to the Viscount of Carcassonne, has been dispossessed of his lands, but he continues to foment rebellion in hopes of recapturing his ancestral domain. Cathar heretics still hide in isolated mountain strongholds. The crusade is now a battle between papal friar-inquisitors and groups of Cathars, not crusading armies of northern French nobles fighting against southern French castles and towns.

Within each county, cities and towns are restless. Trade is making townsmen rich who are often discontented with nobles and bishops alike. The citizens of Flanders are jealously protecting their communal rights against local nobles. The great Champagne Fairs are at their height of power and influence. Merchants will use this interlude of relative peace under Louis IX to become wealthy and demand more liberties from their nobles.

Bishops, seeing the grand cathedrals being built by their neighbors, jealously seek to improve their churches and draw pilgrims to their lands. Many towns are physically divided — one part ruled by the bishop, the other by the local noble. Bishops must also cope with the growing influx into their lands of friars, who are subject to their own superiors, rather than a bishop's commands. The friars' messages of poverty and their success at attracting donations are becoming a thorn in the side of wealthy bishops and abbots.

The world is poised for change, one that does not bode well for France's Cainites.

Storytelling in France

What happens in France will echo across much of Europe. France is the home of three of the major cloistered monastic orders — the Cluniacs, the Cistercians and the Carthusians. Paris holds the mother-house of the Templar order. St-Gilles, in Toulouse, holds

one of the first Hospitaller commanderies. The First Crusade was preached here, and many crusaders come from France. It is the birthplace of Gothic cathedral construction and courtly love. International trade is currently focused on the international Champagne Fairs in western France.

Who influences France and its key mortal powers is a very important question for politically minded Cainites across Europe. Those less interested in politics may nevertheless wish to keep a weather eye on who holds power in Paris and how far that power extends. The recent massacre of many Toulousian Cainites by crusading armies is a stern warning to any vampire who considers himself safe in an isolated haven.

Vampires from other areas may find themselves traveling to or through France on pilgrimage, for business or to follow King Louis IX's call a few years hence to go on crusade.

France, more so than England, varies widely between regions. Capturing those regional differences distinguishes a French chronicle from one set in a generic "European" setting. This chapter discusses first the overarching themes in France, then discusses each of the major regions in turn with notes on both mortal and Cainite affairs.

Yet, no vampire, not even Matriarch Salianna, has a true picture of what is going on all over France. Distances are long. Travel is slow and dangerous. The more outrageous and salacious the rumor, the faster it travels. "Boring" fact travels a bit more slowly.

His Most Christian Majesty

Louis IX, destined to be canonized as a saint in 1297, is one of the most powerful monarchs in Europe in the meantime. Louis and his regent-mother Blanche of Castile are particularly devout, much to the consternation of the region's Cainites. Louis himself is already becoming renowned for his piety and humility. He takes communion six times a year, although ordinary Catholics are required to take communion only once a year. He attends both a Low Mass for the dead and a High Mass each day, and occasionally chants with the choir. He strictly observes feast days and fasts. Legend among the Faithful even claims that the boy-king secretly wears a hair shirt next to his skin and sleeps on a plain mat of cotton.

His mother, a granddaughter of Eleanor of Aquitaine, is also well known for her piety, and she sets a strong example for Louis and his siblings. A king

possessed of such devotion is a dangerous thing for Cainites. Therefore, a few Cainites conspire against Blanche and Louis or seek indirect influence through Louis's patronage of churches.

Louis's father, Louis VIII, died of dysentery and fever on his return from a campaign against the Cathars in Toulouse. Rumors circulate that his vassal, Thibault IV, count of Champagne, poisoned him. Thibault is suspected of sympathies for the counts of Toulouse and of Carcassonne. He argued against Louis VIII's siege of Avignon and took his knights home promptly at the end of his 40 days of feudal service. Other rumors circulate that Thibault is, or was, having an affair with Blanche of Castile.

Barely a month after his father's death, Louis IX was crowned in Reims in 1226 at the age of 12. His father specifically named Blanche as regent and swore the knights and prelates with him on campaign to support his son. This decision does not sit entirely well with Louis IX's uncle, Philippe Hurepel. Thus far, Philippe Hurepel has loyally supported Blanche and been rewarded with lands and money.

When the news of Louis VIII's death reached Blanche of Castile, she dispatched summons to those who should attend the coronation at Reims. Louis IX was knighted at Soissons on the way to his coronation. A few prominent nobles did not attend the coronation, including Hugh le Brun, Count of La Marche, and Pierre of Dreux, Count of Brittany. Blanche forbade Thibault IV, Count of Champagne, to attend because of the rumors surrounding him.

Pierre of Dreux, Thibault IV, Hugh le Brun and Raymond VII of Toulouse formed the heart of an early rebellion against Louis. The first uprising failed in March of 1227, when Thibault IV betrayed the conspiracy to Blanche. Hugh le Brun and Pierre of Dreux paid homage to Louis IX, thus acknowledging him as their rightful monarch.

Another group of barons tried to abduct Louis at Corbeil as he returned from Orleans to Paris in 1228. Blanche summoned the royal knights and the people of Paris to escort Louis to Paris.

That same year, certain barons persuaded Philippe Hurepel to move against Count Thibault. (In effect, an indirect move against Blanche by attempting to dispose of her ally.) Enguerrand, Baron of Coucy, secretly commissioned popular ballads that resurrected the rumors about Thibault IV's murder of Louis VIII. Other ballads claimed that Blanche had stolen money from the royal treasury for her family in Spain. Still others claimed that Blanche was delaying Louis IX's marriage to keep hold of him, for

when Louis married and was declared an adult, the regency would end.

The barons attacked Thibault IV in Champagne in 1229-30. Meanwhile Pierre of Dreux went to England to pay homage to Henry III. (Doing so, of course, violated his previous homage to Louis IX.) Blanche demanded the barons cease their attacks on Champagne and turn eastward against Brittany. They obeyed, but brought only a token number of knights to answer Blanche's call. Thibault IV, however, responded with 300 of his knights. Pierre was expecting help from Henry III, who landed a small army at Saint Malo, but Henry III never moved to support Pierre. Hugh le Brun, the third conspirator in the last uprising, stayed loyal to Blanche this time and was rewarded with lands on the border of his county.

This war was a stalemate. The barons were unenthusiastic about a campaign in Brittany and gave lukewarm support. The royal army seized a few border castles and cities, but it disbanded without removing Pierre. In 1231, the royal army enters Brittany and forces a three-year truce. Blanche then brings the royal army to Champagne to force the barons to cease their war against Thibault IV. The situation, while troubling, poses little actual threat to royal authority, as the nobles continue to support and obey the king. For example, when Louis IX calls an assembly of nobles to pass an ordinance forbidding Jews to lend money at interest (usury being a sin), almost all the barons and counts respond to his summons, and all adhere to his ordinance.

Future Fates

Louis IX marries Margaret of Provence in 1234 and becomes king in his own right. Blanche continues as one of his principal advisors. In 1239, Louis acquires the remnants of the Crown of Thorns and commissions a chapel for them. Sainte Chapelle, consecrated in 1248, will be one of the finest Gothic churches in France.

In 1244, Louis IX falls ill and swears a vow to go on crusade. In order to settle royal affairs and make his kingdom safe for a prolonged absence, he holds a series of inquests. He appoints Dominicans, Franciscans, monks from the secular clergy and knights as *enquêteurs* to investigate all of his royal officers and report on misdeeds, popular complaints, improper managing of royal rights and moneys and so on. Royal officials who misused their offices are dismissed and more trustworthy officers appointed. (These detailed ongoing investigations are likely to be dangerously intrusive into Cainite noble's affairs.

The Grand Court and Courts of Love may well try to hijack the investigations as a way of finding out more about their rivals under the cloak of mundane royal authority.)

In 1248, Louis and his wife, Margaret, depart for a disastrous crusade in Egypt, returning in 1254. (Blanche dies in 1252.) Despite the crusade's failure, Louis returns to the height of his popularity and power. He makes even stronger efforts to organize royal affairs and ensure that his officers are trustworthy and well behaved. He tries to stamp out blasphemy, gambling, prostitution and usury. Jews in the royal domains fall under increasing restrictions. Louis IX reforms France's money and begins issuing standardized royal coins. He tries to mediate private wars among his vassals, abolish trial by combat and restore Roman law. The effort succeeds, as long as Louis pays careful attention to his vassals, when his attention is elsewhere, blasphemy, gambling, private wars and other vices return swiftly to their normal levels.

His brother, Charles of Anjou, is crowned King of Sicily in 1265. In 1270, Louis IX goes on crusade again and dies in Egypt later that year. His son Philippe III succeeds him. Louis IX is canonized as a saint in 1297.

The Royal Court

Louis's monarchy is based in Paris at the Conciergerie on the Seine. He retained his father's great officers including the chancellor, chamberlain, constable and butler, many of whom had served his grandfather, Philippe II Auguste.

The king himself controls the lands immediately around Paris, the duchy of Normandy, and much of the land in the regions of Anjou and Blois along the Loire river. Royal agents, called *ballis* (seneschals), administer these lands, collect taxes and fees and act as the king's eyes in his territory. This network of agents and administrators gives Louis IX one of the best royal bureaucracies of the time, allowing him a steady supply of income for his projects and crusades.

The other lands described here are duchies and counties whose rulers are sworn to obey Louis IX as vassals.

Louis and Blanche travel frequently around the royal lands and visit with their powerful vassals. The royal court is large, and food shipments are slow. Moving the court allows the king to draw from his best-stocked lands. Frequent travel also allows the young king to meet his vassals in their homes and to personally inspect their lands.

The Grand Court and the Courts of Love

France is primarily Toreador domain, but they share it grudgingly with the Ventrue. The Grand Court of Paris is, in theory, the center of this alliance. Ventrue princes have their own courts, which send representatives to the Grand Court. Toreador Princes have their own Courts of Love, which send emissaries to the four greater Courts of Love. Only the most promising of those courts go to the Court of Love in Paris.

The Grand Court

The Grand Court was formed in the aftermath of the fall of Rome. Currently headed by the Ventrue Geoffrey, it is an alliance of the noble and ecclesiastical factions of Clan Ventrue with Clan Toreador (other High Clans are not unwelcome, but they aren't very common). The Court has waxed and waned in influence over the past four centuries. At its height, it was the focal point of Cainite politics in Western Europe. Ventrue and Toreador nobles attended the Court clad in their finest robes, surrounded by their most promising retainers.

Now, the Grand Court is in decline. Just eight years ago, Geoffrey deposed his sire Alexander, who had ruled in Paris since the earliest days of the French crown. The Grand Court guided the French kings to victory over England's Henry II, Richard I and John I, and thus to the greatest expansion of royal power since Charlemagne. Now, Geoffrey's hand is untried. He made many bargains for support against Alexander, and is having trouble meeting all of his conflicting obligations. He faces a regent and king he has promised to protect in return for Véronique d'Orléans support, despite the risk of their strong devotion to their faith and uncanny eye for followers touched by Cainite influence. (For a more detailed history of the Grand Court see **Libellus Sanguinis I: Masters of State.**)

Alexander fled France and is believed to be plotting his return from somewhere in the Holy Roman Empire. Of Alexander's strongest ally, the Countess Saviarre, little is known. Many of Alexander's Ventrue allies had been absent at the Albigensian Crusade when Alexander fell and are still busy consolidating their Toulousian conquests or mourning their own dead. Most are more interested in revenge against Esclarmonde and her allies. Conspiracies with Alexander can wait.



Alexander's fall was part of a longstanding struggle between French Cainites of a traditional Catholic faith, and those supporting the Cainite Heresy. Alexander allowed Anatole, an ashen priest, to debate the Cainite Heretic Bishop Antoine de St. Lys in a series of theological discourses over the place of Caine and Cainites. Cainite Paris followed the debates with rapt attention. When Anatole disgraced Bishop Antoine, the Heresy supporters rioted, attacking Cainite and mortal alike. Alexander's efforts to regain control left him weak and overextended. Geoffrey and Salianna staged their coup, ruthlessly executing the leaders of the riots. Alexander escaped an ambush and fled. Countess Saviarre vanished. Salianna and her allies are attempting to hunt her down because she knows far too much about the secrets of the Grand Court for their comfort. Many suspect that she will be acting as Alexander's eyes and hand, preparing the way for his return to power. Rumors credit her with every setback and threat to the Grand Court, Matriarch Salianna or the French crown. Wherever she is, she moves circumspectly.


The Courts of Love

The Toreador have turned their attentions from the Grand Court to their own Courts of Love. The

Courts of Love are based on the mortal courts that Eleanor of Aquitaine founded. Both the Toreador and Ventrue favored Eleanor, former Queen of France and later Queen of England. Both clans, and other factions as well, considered Embracing her, but none was willing to let a rival have the honor or the services of so skilled and ambitious a politician. The High Clans tacitly agreed to let her die peacefully (which she did in 1204).

Salianna, the Matriarch of the Courts of Love, has a strong hold on power in France, and she supports Geoffrey's position in the Grand Court. Her court lies in Paris, and most of its members are also members of the Grand Court. The four greater Courts of Love are centered in Chartres (Blois), Troyes (Champagne), Poitiers (Poitou) and Carcassonne (Toulouse). Some Toreador princes have set up Courts of Love in their own cities in imitation of the greater courts.

Salianna's major vassals are Isouda de Blaise (Queen of Blois) based in Chartres; Hélène La Juste (Queen of Champagne), based in Troyes; and Etienne (King of Poitou), based in Poitiers. Esclarmonde the Black, Queen of Toulouse, was one of Salianna's vassals. She was repudiated, however, after King Etienne presented evidence at the Grand Court of Esclarmonde's treasonous alliance with Lasombra



Cainites to expand her lands into Aragon. Salianna is openly considering candidates to replace her court once Esclarmonde's inconvenient resistance in Toulouse is ended.

Like the Grand Court, the Courts of Love are meeting grounds for Toreador, Ventrue, Lasombra and, less frequently, other clans. Salianna herself is allied with the Ventrue Mithras of London and the Ventrue Hardestadt of the Court of the Black Cross. This alliance does not bode well for Alexander's chances of returning, given Salianna's support for Geoffrey.

Cainites and the Albigensian Crusade

In the south, the Cainites have suffered greatly from the Albigensian Crusade. Simon de Montfort, leader of the crusaders, burned and destroyed any stronghold he could not control. A number of Cainites met Final Death in those fires. Even the grave is no refuge, for friar-inquisitors exhume and burn the bodies of known heretics to keep them from tainting holy ground. The crusaders also discovered mages in the Pyrenees, but they have lumped all of their supernatural foes together as aspects of the Cathar heresy. In addition to mortal attacks, some Cainites used the crusade as cover to hunt down rivals and blame deaths on the friar-inquisitors.

Esclarmonde the Black's request for help from her Matriarch, the Grand Court and the other queens met with no success. King Etienne presented damning evidence of a treasonous alliance with Lucita of Aragon to the court, which demanded Esclarmonde return to answer the charge. Salianna advised her to stay and send an ambassador to avoid assassination. Her ambassador was unable to satisfactorily refute the evidence, forcing Alexander and Salianna to withdraw their support for her. Ventrue Cainites enthusiastically joined the ongoing Albigensian Crusade for land, for their faith and to oust a treasonous ally of the Magisters.

Esclarmonde could have held her own against her Cainite rivals if they didn't have the cover of mortal armies and friar-inquisitors. Esclarmonde knew Etienne had framed her. She did not realize, however, that Salianna had betrayed her until Alexander's fall. She now believes that she was intentionally and skillfully used to focus Ventrue wrath and solidify Geoffrey's position.

Esclarmonde supports Raymond-Roger IV, the excommunicated Viscount of Carcassonne, partly out of personal Cathar beliefs and partly because she

needs his mortal armies to help her keep back the mortal crusaders and to strike at Cainite crusaders during the day. Rumors persist that she has spent vast sums of hoarded personal funds to hire Low Clan assassins to kill Cainites among the crusaders. Other rumors insist that she has helped the Lupines, also hard-pressed by the crusades, with strikes on Cainite crusaders. Regardless of any truth to her rumored alliance with Lucita of Aragon before the crusade, Esclarmonde was grateful for the brief Aragonese intervention on Toulouse's behalf.

Esclarmonde has warned her allies that there is more to this crusade than a mortal war over land and theology, since some of the friar-inquisitors seem far too knowledgeable about Cainite weaknesses and about long-hidden strongholds. At present, Esclarmonde is trying to maintain the tenuous mortal peace while she recovers and gathers allies for a counter-strike. Some suspect that she is also making certain to keep a line of retreat open if things completely collapse.

The War of Princes

The major vampiric powers of France, Salianna and Geoffrey, form a curious parallel to Blanche and Louis. Salianna acts as patron to the young Geoffrey, who is struggling to establish his legitimacy as Alexander's heir. Geoffrey made many bargains to solidify his coup, which he is hard-pressed to keep. He must also defend himself against Alexander's inevitable attempts to regain his power. When Esclarmonde's rebellion ends, he will have to deal with Alexander's French allies and supporters.

Salianna is allied with Mithras, the Ventrue lord of London and Hardestadt of the Court of the Black Cross. The alliance with Mithras is stormy, however. Some English Ventrue who lost their lands along with their mortal counterparts when Philippe II Auguste conquered English lands in Normandy and Poitou lobby Mithras for support. Several of these expatriates intrigue in Brittany, Flanders and Normandy, pressing their mortal allies and pawns to cause trouble for the French crown and provide cover for their own efforts against Geoffrey and Salianna.

She and Geoffrey are grateful for Esclarmonde the Black's ongoing rebellion. Salianna and Geoffrey owe several favors in return for support in the coup. Some of those favors involve destroying strongholds of the Cainite Heresy. The ongoing war provides cover for strikes against the Heresy. Other favors involve support for ashen priests and for the mortal monar-

THE ART OF COURTLY LOVE

Courtly love was a mortal inspiration adopted with great passion by the Toreador. Eleanor of Aquitaine, then Queen Mother of England, created the first Court of Love in Poitiers in 1168. Her court, attended by her daughter Marie, Countess of Champagne; Marie of Brienne, Countess of Flanders; and many other noblewomen and troubadours, was a place where suitors would seek advice on matters of the heart from the queen. Marie de Champagne created another Court of Love in Troyes in 1181.

The basic ideal of courtly love is that a knight holds his lady (particularly an unattainable one) as the pinnacle of virtue and beauty and does great deeds in her name, all in return for a smile, a word of praise or a gentle glance. The lady is expected to support her "suitor," but she is not required to be physically intimate. To what extent this model remains ideal and to what extent it sanctions adultery is a matter for each pair of lovers. Cainites are drawn to the idea because it is a chance to escape damnation, to love and be loved without tasting blood. While Scions who uphold notions of chivalry often support these courts, the Road of Humanity easily holds the greatest love and support for them.

The Toreador Courts of Love were based on Eleanor's court, but they have grown with swiftness unheard of in Cainite society. Unlike their mortal counterparts, they have become a source of both emotional and significant practical power. While the courts rarely issue direct commands to local princes, a queen has great persuasive authority. The

Cainite and mortal courtiers who crowd her court looking for favor are quite willing to destroy a rival by innuendo, duel or outright assassination.

Like their mortal counterparts, each court has a queen, often chosen by popular acclaim. The queens set the rules by which games of courtly love are played, encourage those who play well, punish those who err and occasionally deign to teach the new and inexperienced.

Among the queens, Isouda de Blaise (Chartres) finds stained glass and architecture fascinating. Cainites with skills in sculpture, painting and metallurgy will have an easier time finding favor in her courts. Hélène (Champagne) is an adventurer at heart. The queen's crown forces a certain respectability upon her, but a Cainite who shows aptitude for adventure, derring-do and wit will please her. Crétien de Troyes, author of many Arthurian tales, was among her favorite mortal storytellers, and Salianna herself had to talk Hélène out of Embracing him. Etienne (Poitou), the only "king" of the Courts of Love is a patron of poetry and the written arts. He had been a patron to Eleanor of Aquitaine and her father Count William IX. Cainites who are literate and skilled with song, rhyme or words will do well in his court. (A few Cainites insist on referring to Etienne as "Queen," believing it to be no more proper to refer to the male head of a Court of Love as "King" than to call the female master of a city "Princess." Etienne respects the few who are brave enough to say this to his face, and he has debated the topic in his court.)

chy. Geoffrey also sought Tremere aid in weakening Alexander, and he repaid the Usurpers with support for their raids against mortal magicians' chantries in the Pyrenees.

The ongoing rebellion provides a good distraction for Alexander's Ventrue allies. Salianna has circulated rumors that Esclarmonde is negotiating an alliance of convenience with the Assamite survivors of the Spanish *Reconquista* in the Pyrenees to defeat the crusaders and their Ventrue and Tremere allies. Geoffrey has circulated rumors that Esclarmonde hired assassins to kill Louis IX. (Historically, a Muslim assassin appeared at Louis's court in 1236 to warn him of an impending attack by the "Old Man of the Mountain." History records that nothing came of the attack.)

Many Cainites in France are not allied with the Grand Court or the Courts of Love. The Prometheans find comfortable homes in the chartered cities of Flanders and among the bustle of the Champagne Fairs. A number of refugees from Constantinople and the Crusader States arrived in Paris in 1215. The city, while large, is not large enough to absorb the influx without strain. Salianna and Geoffrey are busily trying to settle the newcomers in areas with recent vampiric depopulation, like Toulouse and the former English lands. Much like their mortal counterparts, the immigrants are finding it difficult to resettle in new lands with strange languages, customs and climates.

Heresy

"In a measure he curbed the habitual headstrong madness of the French, who yearned to shed blood. For he had heard that they identified heretics by pallor alone, as if it were a certain fact that those who have a pale complexion are heretic."

—Letter from Wazo of Liège to Roger II of Châlons-sur-Marne, circa 1040

Pallor is a traditional sign of heresy, which is a dangerous association for Cainites. Pope Gregory IX publishes a bull in 1233 in which among the practices of heretics is the appearance of an "ice-cold, pale man." Gregory IX also wrote that when an initiate kissed the cold, pallid man, "every remnant of faith in the Catholic Church that lingers in the man's heart departs him." Obviously, the Church has learned something of Cainites, even if it does not refer to them by name.

Inquisitor-friars in Toulouse are provoking riots by exhuming and burning the bodies of deceased Cathars. Perhaps it is merely a coincidence, or perhaps the friars have been told the weaknesses of their foes.

Being deemed a heretic in 1230 isn't difficult. Many a semi-literate village priest has a loose grasp on the details of orthodox theology and innocently passes on mistakes to his parish. These mistakes can later damn the parishioners as heretics. A fair number of bishops themselves are more concerned with politics, hunting and the construction of a remarkable cathedral than with the details of their faith. Pope Innocent III removed the two archbishops and six bishops in the Toulouse region in a single act for their failure to stop the spread of Catharism in southern France, calling them "blind creatures, dumb dogs, who no longer bark."

Papal directives attacking heresy focus a great deal of attention on those who avoid church services, who do not eat in public, who are pale or who behave strangely. A heretic's property is forfeit to the Church, and a share is often given to the informer who reveals or testifies against the heretic. It will soon become profitable, and politically useful, to denounce one's neighbors as heretics. Shielding one's neighbors is dangerous. It becomes a sin to hide heretics or fail to report suspected heresy. Bishops are required to convene annual synods where priests can be examined for heresy.

All of these measures combine slowly to root Cainites out of large segments of the Church. Heretic hunts, mass burnings and the destruction of corpses destroy a number of Cainites and their followers

who are not careful to hide their natures. The War of Princes must be conducted with great care, lest it bring down too much attention on the principals.

Albigensian Crusade

The Albigensian Crusade is several different wars at once. It is the first crusade declared by the Papacy in Europe against Christian heretics. Knights and soldiers from Northern Europe and England can gain all the spiritual benefits of being a crusader without the lengthy travel to Outremer. Ashen knights and priests also join to root out both Cathars and Cainite Heretics.

The crusade is also a civil war of territory. Northern French and English knights hope to seize fiefs and towns for their own, and to plunder the rich south for their own gain. The Toulousian nobility is badly fragmented and uncertain where to ally. Cainite childer see an opportunity to claim lands and towns for themselves by ousting the rebellious followers of Esclarmonde.

Eventually, friar-inquisitors succeed the mortal soldiers. They investigate citizens for unorthodox religious views, seize heretics' property and burn heretics who refuse to recant. Ashen priests travel among them to ferret out surviving Cainite Heretics. Chronicles set in France, Spain or England may involve this crusade. It is certainly a topic of interest and speculation around Europe.

The County of Toulouse and the neighboring Viscounty of Carcassonne are the heart of the Cathar heresy. The Cathars, called Albigensians in France because many live in and around the town of Albi, are dualists. They believe that the material world is evil and that redemption means the liberation of the soul from flesh. They condemn marriage and sex. They are vegetarians, and they do not eat meat, milk, eggs or other products of flesh or intercourse. They reject the Church's teachings about the sacraments. Indeed, they believe that they are the true Christians and that the clergy serves a Satanic church. The poverty and simple lives of the Cathar preachers is in stark contrast to the wealth and worldliness of many bishops and priests.

Pope Innocent III issued bulls (papal pronouncements) against heretics, then replaced bishops and archbishops who had not been able to demonstrate effective progress against the Cathars. Next, he sent Cistercian monks, papal legates and noted preachers to preach by example, debate Cathars and exchange



written reports. Among Innocent's agents were Dominic de Guzman, founder of the Dominican order; Arnaud Amaury, former abbot of Cîteaux; and Pierre de Castelnau, a Cistercian and former archdeacon of Maguelonne.

Most Cainities ignored the initial influx of monks and preachers. A few suspected some Lasombra conspiracy at the root of the Papacy's sudden interest in Toulouse. Some Toulousian Cainities held Cathar beliefs, others agreed with their criticisms of the local clergy. Toulouse was a good place for the heretics to settle. The Pyrenees provide many isolated valleys where a Cainite can do as he pleases with little interference from other mortal or immortal powers. Cainite Heretics took advantage of the isolation to set up monasteries. Mages had long used the area for chantries.


In January of 1208, Pierre de Castelnau was assassinated and Count Raymond VI of Toulouse blamed. Certainly Raymond VI shed few tears over Pierre's death and did not look very hard for the assassin. Innocent responded by excommunicating Raymond and his neighbor, Viscount Roger III of Carcassonne, and by preaching a crusade against Toulouse and the Cathars. Raymond submitted to the Papacy and joined the crusade. Roger III did not.

Again, the assassination caused little concern at Queen Esclarmonde's court. A change of mortal counts would be, at worst, inconvenient. Toulouse had been besieged by English and French royal armies over the past half-century — this "crusade" would be just another mortal war. It would be annoying to some, but an opportunity for others.

The crusading army came to Béziers in July of 1208 and demanded the town surrender some 200 named heretics. The town consuls refused. Arnaud Amaury told the crusaders, "*Caedite eos. Novit enim Dominus qui sunt eius.*" ("Massacre them. The Lord knows His own.") Béziers' cathedral was burned and the town was sacked. Amaury reported to the pope that the crusaders had only been able to kill 20,000.

The massacre at Béziers was a shock to Toulousian Cainites (to say nothing of the mortal citizenry). Amaury's crusaders killed the city's prince and most of his entourage and ghouls in the fires. The few survivors fled directly to Queen Esclarmonde's court demanding she do something to avenge the massacre. Esclarmonde first warned those in the path of the army to disperse or hide. She sent her ghouls to aid Viscount Roger III's army and asked the local princes for help.

News of the massacre had barely arrived when Esclarmonde received a summons to the Grand Court



to answer an accusation of treason. Along with that message, was a private message from Salianna advising Esclarmonde to send an ambassador instead of coming herself and to be wary of assassins. Given the shock of Béziers, staying safely in Toulouse seemed prudent.

The brutality of the siege caused the neighboring city of Narbonne and other cities in the army's path to surrender as the crusaders advanced. Neither undead prince nor mortal council wanted to risk another massacre. Esclarmonde found the princes reluctant to fight. Surely this was a simple war over land that would end as soon as the mortals defeated the count and viscount. Things would settle back to normal thereafter.

The crusaders captured Carcassonne after a siege in August. The citizens left, "taking nothing with them but their sins." Roger III was captured at Carcassonne, and he died in custody a few months later. Roger's wife and young son (Raymond-Roger IV) took refuge with the Count of Foix, whose sister was a Cathar. Esclarmonde moved her court to Foix as well.

A minor northern baron, Simon IV de Montfort, became the leader of the crusade and took command of the lands conquered by the crusaders. (Simon had also been involved in the Fourth Crusade, but he refused to take part in the siege of Constantinople.) Arnaud Amaury was made Archbishop of Narbonne — an important port for the crusaders and their supplies. In Béziers, Eon de l'Etoile, an ashen knight from Brittany, was named prince by the crusading Cainites.

Forty days after the crusade began, the bulk of Simon's army left, having fulfilled their feudal obligations. Count Raymond VI was unable to reach any reasonable peace with the papal legates, and he decided to fight for his lands. Another massacre followed, this time at Minerve on July 22, 1210. One hundred and forty Cathars who refused to convert were burned at the stake; three women of the town agreed to convert and were spared. This was the first instance of burning at the stake in the crusade. Among the victims were Minerve's prince and several of her ghouls. Again, the survivors fled.

Eon de l'Etoile led forces deep into the Pyrenees. He had heard rumors that the Templar order had found a great relic in Jerusalem and had given it the Cathars for safekeeping. Rumor held that the Cathars dismissed Christ's crucifixion as a sham because they knew, and had proof of, what really happened at Golgotha. Eon's quest drove him to seek out and destroy many havens, trying to force local mortals and Cainites to divulge Cathar secrets. He was joined by other

Cainites — primarily high-blooded childer seeking domain in the south and Tremere Scions searching for mortal mages hidden in the valleys.

In 1211, Simon captured Lavaur and burned 300 to 400 Cathars. He continued to attack and raid various cities and castles from 1211 to 1212. Esclarmonde turned eastward seeking allies. (There were rumors, of course, that she had already been seeking allies among the Lasombra in Aragon.) King Pedro of Aragon allied with Count Raymond, since he believed that the Church was treating Raymond too harshly and did not want to see the crusade spread into his lands. Pedro's forces attacked Muret, 12 miles south of Toulouse in September of 1212. Simon's relief force attacked the besiegers, killing Pedro. Raymond's forces scattered. The Aragonese intervention was proof enough to Alexander and his Ventrue allies that Esclarmonde was allied with the Magisters. More high-blooded knights — chiefly Venture and Toreador — joined the crusaders.

Simon continued to attack garrisons, destroying castles in his wake because he did not have enough loyal forces to control them. Cainites harassed his army, raiding garrisons he left behind, but they found undead crusaders among the army directing attacks at vampiric havens.

In 1215, Prince Louis VIII campaigned briefly in the area, destroying the walls of Narbonne and Toulouse. Queen Eleanor abandoned efforts to persuade the Lasombra to return and focused her efforts on new alliances with the Low Clans against the crusaders. Not entirely trusting Saviarre, she sought support and information from Queen Hélène in Champagne. In December, 1215, Simon de Montfort was formally given control of the lands he had captured. Raymond VI's son, Raymond VII, was given the family lands in Provence.

Raymond VI and Simon continued to fight over the County of Toulouse, including several major battles in and around the city of Toulouse. Simon died in a siege of Toulouse on June 25, 1218. Esclarmonde captured a Tremere knight and learned that a group of Parisian Tremere had allied with Geoffrey in return for a free hand in Toulouse.

Amalric, Simon's 26-year-old son, took command of the crusade and retreated to Carcassonne. In 1224, Amalric retreated from Toulouse entirely, offering his father's conquests to the French crown. Count Raymond VI died in 1222.

At this point, his son, Count Raymond VII of Toulouse, seemed triumphant. Viscount Raymond-Roger IV, heir to the Viscounty of Carcassonne, had

reached his majority and taken the field. Simon de Montfort was dead, his son fled. Archbishop Arnaud Amaury also died in 1223. After a bloody 14-year war, the situation seemed almost back to where it was in 1209.

Esclarmonde too seemed pleased. She had finally gathered the allies she needed to defeat and slay several prominent Ventrue crusaders and their ghouls. Several of the chantries captured by the Tremere were burned and destroyed as revenge for their aid of the crusaders at Béziers. In return for his efforts to rein in the ashen knights and priests, Esclarmonde gave Eon de l'Etoile several relics that had been hidden by the Cainite Heresy. She sent warning to Paris of Geoffrey's alliance with the Tremere, as well as rumors that he planned to move against Alexander himself. Her messenger stopped to consult with Queen Hélène before proceeding to Paris and died at the hands of Salianna's partisans. The warning was never given.

Unfortunately for Raymond VII, King Louis VIII was interested in Amalric's offer of his father's lands in Toulouse. Geoffrey and Salianna, now in control of the Grand Court, called upon their allies to prove their loyalty to Geoffrey by supporting the royal army in its attack on Toulouse and the rebellious Esclarmonde. Queen Hélène sent warning to Esclarmonde and a promise to withdraw her own vassals as soon as their required service was complete. Her knights were among those who urged Count Thibault IV to withdraw from the royal army at the siege of Avignon in 1226.

Raymond VII was excommunicated as a heretic in 1225. Pope Honorius III preached a crusade against him. Louis VIII brought his army south, capturing Avignon after a siege. Carcassonne surrendered. When Louis VIII died in Auvergne on November 8, 1226 as he was returning to northern France, he left his seneschal, Humbert de Beaujeu, in charge of the crusade.

Humbert invaded Labécède and destroyed it. The entire town was massacred. Humbert's Cainite allies fared poorly, however. Battle-hardened southern Cainites ambushed and slew many of Geoffrey's supporters among the royal army, giving the young Prince of Paris his first major defeat. Therefore, neither he nor Salianna could spare the influence to try to scuttle negotiations between Blanche of Castile, Louis IX's regent and Count Raymond VII in 1228. Count Raymond VII swore his loyalty to the Church and to Louis's heir, Louis IX, at the Peace of Paris (1229). He received most of his lands back, and others were given to the French crown.

Chronicles During the Crusade

The crusade is a perilous time for Toulousian Cainites. The contending armies burn and destroy any fortification they cannot hold. Peasants scatter at rumor of any army's approach. If the crusaders capture any suspected heretic, they burn him. Sometimes, they even disinter well-known dead heretics and burn their corpses.

Some northern Cainites, like their mortal counterparts, take advantage of the opportunity for a crusade without the danger and travel involved in a trip to Outremer. Some see the crusade as their spiritual duty. Others see an opportunity for profit from looting and pillaging Toulouse. Still others take advantage of the chaos to settle feuds with southern rivals or even engage in the forbidden practice of diablerie.

Some Tremere take advantage of the crusade as cover to hunt down a group of Salubri hiding in the Pyrenees among the Cathars. Other Tremere use the crusaders as pawns to attack and raid chantries deep in the mountains. A few Assamites and Followers of Set use the cover of the Crusades to kill nobles whose families had been particularly brutal in Outremer.

Bishop Arnuld has come to the disturbing realization that at least some crusaders have been specifically and thoroughly rooting out every prominent adherent of the Cainite Heresy in Toulouse. Perhaps Queen Esclarmonde's claims of a conspiracy are not as far-fetched as he had believed.

The crusade destroys one haven of the Order of Bitter Ashes, that of Count Humbert Dideaux, seneschal of the Castle of the Holy Family. After Count Humbert's castle falls, he flees Toulouse for Scotland (see Chapter One).

When the crusade enters its second phase, Toulousian Cainites will find Dominican inquisitors as dangerous a foe as crusading armies. Obviously murdering the friars is risky. They have the tepid support of Count Raymond VII, who must respond to any attack on the inquisitors or risk yet another invasion from the north. Suborning the friars is likewise difficult. Many Dominicans are fervent in their faith, since the order is too new to have grown lax and corrupt. The Dominicans are thorough and tenacious, questioning villages about anyone who acts oddly or who might harbor heretical thoughts.

Esclarmonde the Black has managed to hold her own in the field and deal a significant setback to Geoffrey's allies, but her alliance is a fragile mix of Low Clans and refugees united only by their hatred of the northern in-

vaders. If the truce holds, she will have trouble restraining her allies from taking revenge and sparking yet another invasion. She needs time to cement the loyalties of her existing forces and to seek new allies. Rumors whisper that she is planning to retreat to Provence, a county that is culturally similar to Toulouse, but has not been as much a target of the crusaders.

The Regions

France is still very much a nation with large divisions between its regions. A story or chronicle in the area around Paris should have a different feel in geography, architecture and tone from one set in Brittany or Toulouse. Regional differences and uncertainty about what is going on in Paris or Marseilles or Ghent, are useful tools for Storytellers.

The following sections discuss the major regions of Dark Medieval France. The reader will find the mortal count or ruler of the major holding in the region, as well as the region's geography, history and most prominent features, as well as the most notable Cainites therein.

Anjou

Royal Domain: In trust for Charles of Anjou, brother of King Louis IX

Anjou is part of the Loire valley, a land of gentle valleys, fertile fields and powerful cities. River trade is frequent along the Loire and its tributaries, threatened mostly by sandbars that snag boats in the summer.

Anjou borders rebellious Brittany, so castles along its borders have been strengthened and garrisons increased in case of war. Many of the noble landowners are related to English nobles. Henry II of England was Count of Anjou and Maine and Duke of Normandy before inheriting the English crown in 1153. Anjou has only firmly been part of France since the English defeat at the battle of La Roche-aux-Moines in 1214 (which also sent Melusine d'Anjou, previously the most powerful Cainite in the region, running for England).

The major city of Anjou is Tours. Queen Isouda de Blaise considers Tours' cathedral, Saint-Gatien, unfashionably antiquated. With Chartres near completion, she is looking for another cathedral to design. A fire in 1233 destroys the cathedral, allowing new construction that starts in 1236 and ending in 1547. Fortevraud-l'Abbaye, a monastery for both men and women, is the burial place of Henry II, Eleanor of Aquitaine and Richard I. It is a prominent

pilgrimage site and a place with considerable influence and wealth, which makes it a likely haven for Faithful Cainites.

Anjou is a center of civilization and culture. Chronicles set in Anjou are likely to be primarily concerned with the politics of local princes and the Courts of Love, and conflicting loyalties among those who have family in England.

Queen Isouda de Blaise's domain includes both the mortal counties of Anjou and Chartres. Chartres itself is a prominent cathedral town. It is said that its cathedral holds part of the Virgin's tunic, and it is the only cathedral in France that does not contain any tombs. Isouda is justly proud of her patronage of the cathedral, although its relics make it difficult for Cainites to enter.

Aquitaine

Aquitaine is currently held by Henry III of England and is discussed in Chapter One of this book.

Auvergne

Mostly royal domain

Auvergne is a sparsely populated mountainous land in the center of France, surrounded by the Massif Central. The headwaters of the Loire and the Allier river, both major trade routes, lie in Auvergne. It boasts Roman ruins, Celtic megaliths, dramatic dormant volcanoes and extensive unexplored caves.

Auvergne is famous for Vercingetorix's defeat of Julius Caesar at Gergovia. Vercingetorix, a chieftain of the Gauls, was forced to surrender soon thereafter and crucified by Caesar's order. Some of the Gangrel in Auvergne fought alongside Vercingetorix and continue a centuries-long feud with the Roman Lasombra. The Gangrel rarely leave Auvergne, but they will certainly try to ambush and kill any Roman Cainites who they find in their lands.

Chronicles set in Auvergne will likely emphasize its isolation and wilderness. Cainites hear the frequent howls of Lupines and rumors of the fae. It is dangerous territory for anyone not born to the region or without a local patron. Many Cainites in the mountains follow the Road of the Beast, and rumors in other parts of Europe speak of a Feral paragon here.

Characters may pass through Auvergne on their way to southern France. The roads are considered dangerous to any but a well-armed force. Travelers warn each other of robber knights, village priests who are little more than thieves and bands of peasant brigands.

Blois

Part of the duchy of Champagne: Held by Thibault IV le Chansonnier

Blois, like Anjou, lies along the Loire river valley. The Capetian line of French kings is descended from the counts of Blois. Like Anjou, it is settled, fertile, prosperous and civilized. Its principle cities are Blois and Orléans.

The town of Orléans is growing much faster than the town of Blois. By the end of the century, Orléans' noted community of scholars becomes a university. In a century or so, the nobles of Orléans become predominant and Blois a mere appendage.

Like Anjou, Blois is a center of civilization and culture. Where Anjou is thriving, however, Blois has passed its heyday. The tone in Blois is one of fading glory, decadence, nostalgia for the greatness of the past and dreams of future glory.

Véronique d'Orléans, an influential Zealot who

helped Geoffrey oust Alexander from the Grand Court, often visits her birth city of Orléans, but she has been more active in Paris lately. There is no love lost between her and the Ventrue princes of Brittany. Rumors persist that she encouraged Thibault IV to betray the league against Louis IX, and speculation abounds that she is supporting the young saint-king as a means to excise the Ventrue from the royal court for a mortal generation or two.

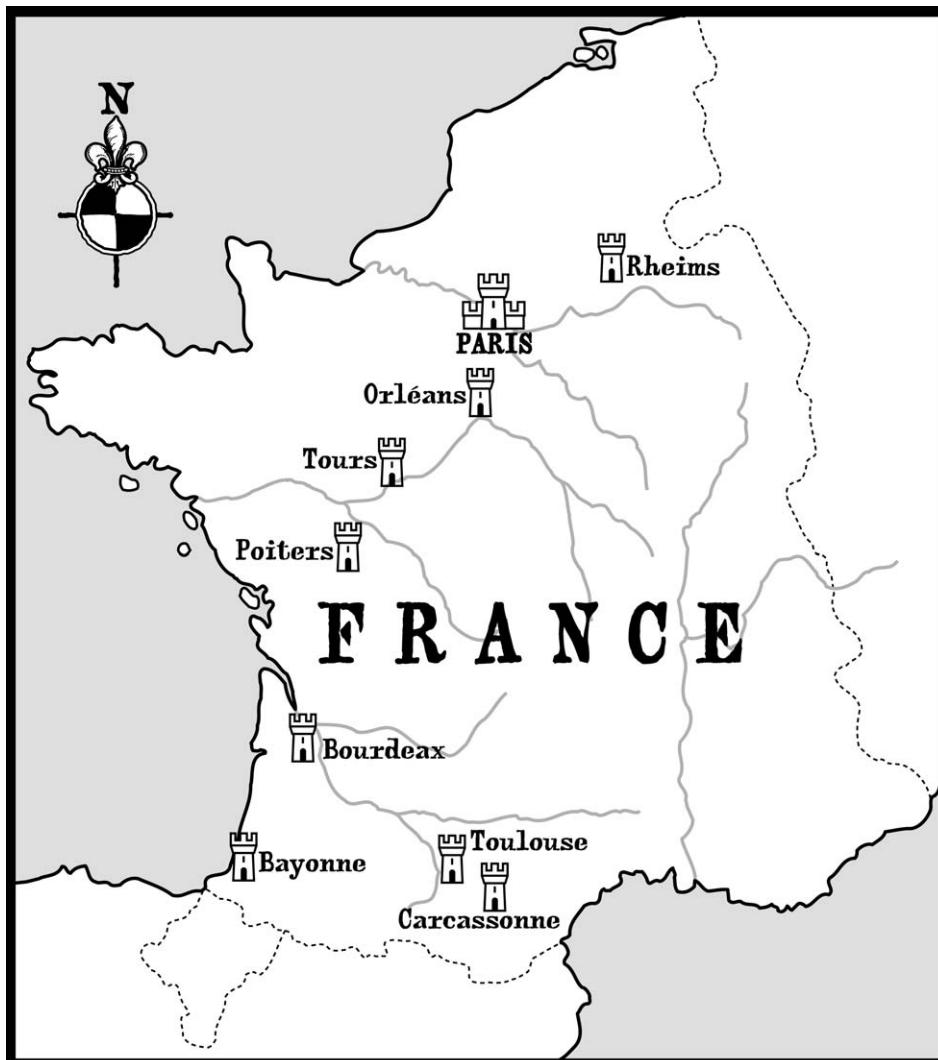
Brittany (Bretagne)

County: Held by Pierre de Dreux, called Mauclerc

Brittany is a rugged land of fishermen and sailors, of Celtic rather than Frankish stock. Many of the peasants speak Breton, a Celtic language similar to Cornish and Welsh. There are more regional saints here than anywhere else in France, most of whom are never recognized by the Papacy. By tradition, every Breton must make a pilgrimage

to the seven cathedrals of Brittany — Saint Briec, Saint Corentine (Quimper), Saint Malo, Saint Patern (Vannes), Saint Pol-de-Léon, Saint Samson (Dol) and Saint Tugdual (Tréguier). If he fails to do so in life, he is doomed to do so as a ghost, although he can travel only a few feet every seven years. Breton Cainites often make or finish the pilgrimage shortly after their Embrace, despite the obvious risks of entering the cathedrals.

The region is known for the vast Fôret de Paimpont (Brocéliande), said to be the home of Merlin, Viviane and Morgaine. Other legends say that Joseph of Arimathea hid the Holy Grail in the Fôret de Paimpont, and that Tristan, hero of several ballads, retired to a castle in the forest after his adventures.





A famous Breton love story involves the drowned city of *Is*, said to be the inspiration for Paris, which lay below sea level protected by dikes and locks. It is said the king's daughter was seduced by a devil who tricked her into stealing the key to the locks from her father and opening the sea gates to prove her love. The sea rushed in, destroying *Is*. The king escaped to found the city of Quimper, but the foolish young princess became a mermaid. It is said that if Good Friday's mass can be celebrated in one of the submerged churches, the seas will retreat, *Is* will rise, and the princess will be freed from her mermaid's curse. Brittany is also home to legends about the *Bag Noz*, a ghost ship that collects the souls of those who drown at sea.

The coastal area, called *Armor* (Breton for "country of the sea"), is very warm. Frost is likely only a dozen days per year (no more often than along the Mediterranean coast). The interior, called *Argoat* ("country of the woods") is a relatively barren, often misty, plateau. Vicious Lupines prowl the area, and stories of the fae are told among the citizenry. The Celtic ruins, especially those near Carnac, draw Cainite scholars, some of whom suspect that there are powerful mystical sites deep within the forests. All agree, though, that such sites would have protectors, perhaps even of the Lhiannan bloodline.

A chronicle set in Brittany should include its Celtic heritage, its separation in culture and language from France and the legends of its forests. The interior should be a mysterious place where a prudent Cainite will not wander without compelling reason. Count Pierre's efforts to ally with Henry III and his unsuccessful struggles against Blanche of Castile, and Ventrue struggles with Toreador-dominated Anjou are also good fodder for a politically oriented chronicle.

Burgundy

Duchy (west of the Saône): Held by Hugh IV (1218-72); **County (east of the Saône):** Held by Otto II; both allied with French crown

The region of Burgundy is a hilly area on France's northeast border with the Holy Roman Empire. It is already known for its wines, which are shipped along the Loire to Paris and eventually to England and along the Saône to the Mediterranean. Wines, at this point, are stored in barrels, and they spoil with age.

Burgundy is the home of Cluny, the mother house of the Clunaic monks (founded in 910), and of Cîteaux, mother house of the Cistercian order (founded in 1098). Both orders are large, wealthy and powerful in 1230. The monasteries bring a large

amount of money (from donations and tithes from daughter houses) and important visitors to Burgundy. Cluny has been under the sole protection of the papacy since 1024. Cîteaux, its vineyards and its daughter houses have been under the personal protection of the Papacy since 1164. Monasteries of both orders are not subject to the control or tithes of any local bishop. In 1230, Cluny is in decline, having suffered several scandals involving nepotism, abbots' mistresses, sodomy among the monks and misused money. Cîteaux has passed the height of its power, and it is having increasing problems reconciling its emphasis on simplicity and spirituality with its wealth and secular power.

The Church of Mary Magdalene in Vézelay claims to have the body of Saint Marie. Popular legend claims that she and Saint Maximinus left Judea shortly after Jesus's martyrdom and settled in southern France. Vézelay claims that its relics were brought here from the original burial site in southern France for protection from Saracen raiders. The original abbey, Saint Maximin in Provence, disagrees. At present, pilgrims are more persuaded by Vézelay's claim to authenticity. Richard I and Philippe II Auguste stopped here to pray before embarking on crusade. Francis of Assisi has recently founded his first convent in Vézelay.

Chronicles set in Burgundy might have themes of fading power and moral corruption. The duchy is currently past its peak of power, as are the two major institutions within it. Both Cluny and Cîteaux are likely to be suspicious of the Dominican and Franciscan friars who compete with their monks for donations and tithes. Underlying

much of Burgundy's history is a certain ruthlessness among its counts, which will become evident when Burgundy rises in power in the years to come.

Champagne

County: Held by Thibault IV le Chansonnier (1201-1253), Count of Champagne and King of Navarre (1234-53); allied unreliably to the French Crown

Champagne is a wealthy county of rolling hills and plains. As home to the international Champagne Fairs (see page 50), it is extremely prosperous. The silver coin minted in Provins, the *denier de Provins*, is the standard coin of the trade fairs, and it is widely accepted across Europe. Champagne is also the home of many French Jews. Thibault and his successors will struggle with the Capetian kings to protect local Jews from royal taxes and expulsions, realizing that the Jews are crucial to Champagne's merchant economy.

Chronicles set in Champagne may focus on its wealth and the constant bustle of the international trade fairs. Characters attending the fairs may come across a rival or foe and be forced to rely on their wits or be forced to break Eudes's peace. If the confrontation occurs in Troyes, characters may find themselves drawn into intrigues between Eudes and Hélène.

Dauphiné

County: Held by Count Andre (1193-1236)

Dauphiné is a mountainous region west of the Rhône and north of the Durance rivers, extending into the Alps toward the Holy Roman Empire. The mountains are known for their cold, snowy winters; violent spring floods; dry, hot summers and warm, clear autumns. The mistral, a strong, cold spring wind, blows from Mount Ventoux through Dauphiné into Provence. Locals claim that the mistral makes them edgy and impatient and gives them headaches. Gusting at up to 60 miles per hour, the wind can keep people awake as it howls across slate and tile roofs. Most mistrals last one to three days, sometimes a full week.

Dauphiné is home to the Convent de la Grande Chartreuse (founded 1084), mother house of the Carthusian order. The order is in some ways ideal for Cainite monks. The order is divided into choir monks and hermit monks. The choir monks tend the fields, deal with guests and provide basic contact with outsiders. Each hermit monk lives alone in an individual stone cell arranged around a cloister. The monks gather wordlessly three times a day for

FUTURE FATES

In 1239, a Dominican friar, Roger le Bougre (a former Cathar), will host a great burning of heretics at Mont Aimé in Champagne. Over 180 heretics burn, and their deaths are observed by Count Thibault IV and 16 bishops from the region. The Mont Aimé burnings are among the largest in northern France, and they are warning signs of the growing power of the Inquisition.

Roger le Bougre is suspiciously well informed about Cainite weaknesses. Some suspect that he is a pawn of one faction or another using the Inquisition to destroy its rivals. Others suspect that he has personal experience with vampires. Rumors suggest he has lost a loved one to the Embrace.

a common celebration of Vespers and the night office. They prepare their own meals and eat alone in their cells except on Sundays and major festivals. On those days, common meals and brief conversations are allowed. A careful Cainite could likely remain cloistered among the Carthursians for decades without being detected.

Dauphiné is mostly rural. The major towns are Grenoble and Vienne, both built over old Roman settlements. Most of Dauphiné's inhabitants live in isolated alpine valleys with little trade or contact with the outside world.

Chronicles set in Dauphiné will likely emphasize its isolation and wilderness, even more so than Auvergne. The mountains are steeper, the valleys deeper, the winters more harsh. The mysterious mistral might affect the moods of mortal and Cainite alike. Cainites who are not native to Dauphiné or who do not have local patrons will have a hard time surviving outside the few cities. Characters may pass through Dauphiné on their way to the Petite Saint Bernard pass and Italy.

Flanders

County: Held by Countess Johanna (1206-1244)

Flanders is the northernmost county of France, a land of fertile fields, marshes and vineyards. The region includes several small counties along the English Channel, the Duchy of Brabant, and the County of Hainault. In 1230, Flanders has a prosperous wool trade with England and with the Champagne Fairs. The height of Flanders' political power was about a century ago, under Count Thierry of Alsace (1128-68) and his son Philippe (1168-91). Since then, the count's power has been declining as the French monarchs expanded their domains.

After Count Baldwin IX became Emperor of Constantinople, Philippe II Auguste tried to influence the succession in Flanders. Flemish lords allied with John I and Emperor Otto IV, but Philippe defeated the coalition at the Battle of Bouvines in 1214. Countess Johanna's husband, Ferrand, son of King Sancho I of Portugal, was captured at Bouvines. Blanche of Castile released him in January of 1227, but he died a year later.

Just five years ago, in 1225, a Flemish hermit masqueraded as Baldwin IX. He was unmasked by King Louis VIII and banished, and then captured in Burgundy and handed over to Baldwin's daughter, Countess Johanna of Flanders, who ordered him

hanged in Lille. A few peasants believe that King Louis was wrong and that the hanged man was indeed the count. Baldwin remains Emperor of Constantinople until he is driven out by the Greeks in 1261, but is Emperor Baldwin really Count Baldwin, or an imposter?

Counts Thierry and Philippe granted charters to several wealthy towns. Others are trying to establish communes. Several cities are sites of conflict between the rival political parties the Leliaerts (supporters of the French kings, named for the fleur-de-lis on the French arms), who enjoy support from the patricians, and the Clauwaerts (supporters of the counts of Flanders, named for the lion's claws in the counts' shield), who represent the lower classes. The cities of Ghent and Ypres are political and economic rivals that occasionally fight each other openly.

Stories set in Flanders are likely based in the major cloth-making cities. Bruges, Ghent and Ypres are growing in wealth and power. The power of the communes is increasing at the expense of the traditional patricians and nobility. This shift will cause as much unrest among Cainite powers as among mortal ones. The Prometheans and Furores are very active in Flanders.

Île de France

Royal domain

The Seine river basin around Paris is the heart of the French monarchy. The region is mostly a low limestone plateau with river valleys and sandy areas. It is dominated by Paris, a city of 50,000 inhabitants in 1230.

Paris is divided by the Seine river into two banks, plus the Île de la Cité (the island in the center of the river). The Louvre Palace (royal castle), the Temple (home of the Templars), the Place de Grève (marketplace), Les Halles (marketplace) and Châtelet (mayor's palace) are on the Right Bank. The Cité is the site of Notre Dame (still under construction), the Bishop's palace, and the Conciergerie (a royal palace). To protect Paris, Philippe II Auguste built the Louvre palace in 1200 and walls around the Left Bank, which he completed in 1210. The Left Bank contains the University of Paris, which is clustered around the chapel of Saint Julien le Pauvre.

Chronicles in Paris can easily focus on intrigues between the Grand Court and Matriarch Salianna's Court of Love, but there is much more going on in the city. The Nosferatu have a haven under the Île de la Cité. They collect information on the High

Clans and take blood and information from the city's lively mob of beggars and thieves. The Temple is the mother house of the Templar order, and a center for banking and commerce. The University of Paris (on strike in 1230) is a growing center for learning and a magnet for Cainite scholars of all clans. Notre Dame is nearing completion. Toreador queens try to lure or enthrall mortal artisans to work on their "pet" cathedrals. Matriarch Salianna, meanwhile, has become jealous of her vassals' works and is looking for a showpiece. Her opportunity will come in 1239 when Louis IX purchases relics that are supposedly part of the Crown of Thorns from Emperor Baldwin of Constantinople. He builds a chapel in the Conciergerie, Sainte-Chapelle, to hold the relics. Matriarch Salianna assists, from a distance, by gathering artists to assist in the project. The resulting chapel is one of the finest examples of Gothic architecture.

Normandy

Duchy: Crown domain

Charles III gave Normandy, which includes the mouth of the Seine, to a Viking chief in 911 as a bribe to protect Paris and the interior from Viking raids. In 1066, William II the Conqueror invaded England, making his heirs both dukes of France and kings of England. At the same time, knights from lesser elite families in Normandy were establishing territorial lordships in southern Italy. Philippe II Auguste invaded and captured Normandy in 1204. Henry III of England disputes this claim, but he cannot effectively contest French control.

Normandy is known for its apple orchards and horse breeders. Rouen, along the Seine, has about 25,000 inhabitants in 1230. Mont-St-Michel, a coastal abbey perched on a granite outcropping in the middle of a large bay, is a noted pilgrimage site.

French and English Cainites struggle in Normandy. The few remaining Cainites with loyalties to England try to hold their domains against French invaders. French Cainites feel that Philippe's conquests entitle them to take territories in Normandy. The whole area is a delicate diplomatic tangle, made worse by the fact that Mithras has largely given up on his former French holdings.

Poitou

County: Held in trust for Louis IX's brother Alphonse

The coast of Poitou is marshy, and Benedictine monks near Niort have been busy draining one set

of marshes for over a century. The interior of Poitou is a fertile limestone plateau. Poitiers, its largest town, commands the so-called gate of Poitou — a gap 44 miles wide between the mountains south of the Loire River and the Massif Central — which serves as the connecting link between northern and southern France.

Like Normandy, Poitou has strong ties to England, and many nobles resent French control. Others rebelled against the Plantagenet kings in favor of France during Henry II's reign. Eleanor of Aquitaine favored Poitiers over her other dowry lands, and she held court there from 1189 to 1199. In 1199, she retired to the island of Orléon, where she established a set of maritime rules, *Les Rôles d'Orléon*, governing shipping and outlawing piracy.

One of the unusual features of Poitou, shared with Aquitaine, Provence and Toulouse, is the preponderance of rural fortified fortress-churches, most of which were built in the late 12th century. These churches were refuges for peasants during unrest, and their belfries were used as watchtowers. Aquitaine, Poitou, Provence and Toulouse also have many bastides — fortified towns built on a planned geometric system. People started building bastides in 1220 to fortify French holdings in Poitou and Toulouse. Bastides were given favorable charters to encourage settlement. Immigrants there were often exempt from military service and certain taxes, but they could be fined if they did not develop their land quickly enough.

Cainite and mortal Christians making a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela (see Chapter Four) often travel through Poitou on their ways south. Thousands of pilgrims every year make the long journey, often with frequent side trips to noted shrines and churches. Cainite pilgrims often make a courtesy visit to King Etienne of Poitou, who holds court in Poitiers. Among other duties, King Etienne keeps order on the pilgrimage routes through Poitou, and he discourages feeding on pilgrims. Etienne asks Cainites to prey instead on the Coquillards, false pilgrims who rob and cheat the pious pilgrims and their hosts.

Provence

County: Held by Raymond Berenger (contested by Raymond VII of Toulouse); Raymond Berenger's daughter Margaret marries Louis IX in 1234

Provence, like Aquitaine, Toulouse, Dauphiné, Poitou and parts of Auvergne, is part of the Languedoc or Occitania. Occitania is named after its language,

Occitan (those who say “oc” instead of “oui” for “yes”), which is more closely based on Latin than the language spoken by Frankish Paris and the north.

The region is more Roman than Frankish in its language and customs. A crucial difference is in inheritance. In the north, a noble family’s major lands tend to pass from parent to a single child, usually the eldest son. Other children may get an inheritance, but every fief has one single ruler. In the south, land is divided among the heirs. In practice, many fiefs are managed by family committees, nominally ruled by whoever holds the title. Quick decisions are difficult at best.

Castles and fortifications are common, but the northern network of feudal military obligations is much weaker in the south. Occitan nobles rely more heavily on mercenaries than on vassal knights and peasant levies. Similarly, northern manorial estates are not common in the south — peasants generally owe their landholder cash rents and dues, rather than field labor. Villages are also more scattered and thinly populated, especially in the Pyrenees.

In the south, as in the north, the towns are often divided under several rules. The bishop often rules the portion of town surrounding his cathedral (the *cit  *). Many towns are governed not by an appointed mayor or *seneschal*, as in many northern cities, but by elected councils. Charters and communes are common in the north as well, but northern counts often have more power over their most important cities. Provence and Toulouse’s cities are important trading places for Genoa and Pisa. Jewish citizens in many of the cities have more privileges and protections from anti-Semitic laws than in the royal domain.

The Templars and Hospitalers are very active in Provence and Toulouse. There are more knights of both orders in Occitania alone than in Outremer. Les Baux, a fortified city in the Alpines, is home to a haven of the Order of the Bitter Ashes. (The other Proven  al haven is at Tarascon, a city on the Rh  ne.)

The Occitans perceive the Franks as covetous, sadistic and tyrannical. The Franks regard the Occitans as effeminate and lacking martial valor. A southern noble is praised for his or her skill at politics, poetry and wit. A northern noble is praised for his fighting prowess. “The Franks to battle, the Proven  aux to the table,” a popular saying ran at the time of Eleanor of Aquitaine’s first marriage.

Count Raymond Berenger is in the midst of a struggle with his cousin Count Raymond VII of

Toulouse over eastern Provence. In 1230, Marseilles asks Raymond VII to aid it in a dispute with Raymond Berenger. Raymond VII agrees and is given part of the town. Raymond Berenger ultimately seeks protection from Louis IX, marrying his eldest daughter to the king in 1234. (Raymond Berenger’s other three daughters also become queens. Eleanor of Provence marries Henry III of England. Sanchia marries Henry III’s brother Richard of Cornwall who is later made King of the Romans after the death of Conrad IV of Hohenstaufen. The youngest, Beatrice, marries Charles of Anjou who later becomes King of Sicily.)

Arles, a former Roman city, is a stronghold of the Nosferatu and Cappadocians, who mostly reside in the Alyscamps, a large necropolis just outside the city. The Alyscamps was built along the old Aurelian Way. It contains many tombs, mausoleums, churches and chapels. People who live along the Rh  ne send their dead to the Alyscamps by floating wooden coffins down the river with a coin nailed to the outside to pay the gravediggers. The coffins are caught by a net under a bridge in Arles and taken to the necropolis.

Avignon, a major city along the Rh  ne, surrendered to Louis VIII in 1226 and was forced to destroy its walls. A royal appointee currently governs the city, but it has strong ties to Anjou and Italy. (From 1304 to 1376, Avignon becomes the home of the Papacy, when the popes flee various civil wars in Italy.)

Les Baux has been home to many troubadours and one of the mortal Courts of Love. Toreadors sometimes visit Les Baux to audition talented musicians.

The Cainite Prince of Marseilles, Saint Regis, is embroiled in a struggle with Furores who have flocked to the city. The mortal leaders of this city of about 25,000 are busy trying to balance the claims of the bishop, Count Raymond VII and the Holy Roman Emperor to maintain the city’s independence. Marseilles is a major supply port for the crusades, Constantinople and Outremer. It is a significant rival to Genoa, Pisa and Venice. Marseilles was also the embarkation point for the tragic Children’s Crusade in 1212, the result of which was that two Marseilles merchants sold hundreds of na  ve children who intended to save Outremer as slaves to the Saracens. (A few children wound up in Saint Regis’s hands.) Some think a group of Ravnos Sybarites in Marseilles might have had a hand in the sale.

Pilgrims travel to Provence to visit the Ste-Baume Massif and Stes-Marie-de-la-Mer. Proven  al legend

says that about 13 years after the crucifixion, Mary Magdalene, Mary mother of James, Martha and her brother Lazarus, as well as several other Biblical notables left Judea and came to Provence. They made landfall at Stes-Marie-de-la-Mer. Several settled there, and a fortified priory protects their tombs against theft and raids. Mary Magdalene left the others and retired to a cave in the Massif, the highest mountain in Provence, for 33 years to atone for her sins. When she neared death, she sought out Saint Maximinus, who gave her last communion and buried her.

In the 11th century, the relics of St. Mary were stolen from the abbey of St-Maximin-la-Ste-Baume near the massif and taken to Vézelay in Burgundy. (In 1279, Charles of Anjou claims to have discovered the true relics at St-Maximin Abbey. When Pope Boniface VII recognizes the relics in 1295, the pilgrims start coming to the Abbey.)

Chronicles in Provence may involve pilgrims who come to Provence's pilgrimage sites or embark for Constantinople or Outremer from Marseilles. Visitors to Marseilles may find themselves caught up in the struggle between Saint Regis and the Furores. Italian Cainites may be caught up in mercantile struggles between Provençal ports and Genoese merchants. Rumor has it that Esclarmonde the Black, Queen of Toulouse, may flee to Provence if things get worse in the Pyrenees. Certainly, she is calling for aid from Occitan, Italian and Aragonese Cainites. Local Cainites might well be concerned about the Albigensian Crusade spreading into Provence in pursuit of fleeing refugees, as well.

Toulouse

County: Held by Raymond VII

As a region, Toulouse includes the Counties of Foix and Toulouse, the Viscountcies of Carcassonne, Montpellier and Narbonne, and several smaller entities ranging from the Pyrenees to Aquitaine to Auvergne to the Rhône river. Toulouse has been torn by the Albigensian Crusade. Cities, castles and fields lie in ruins, the inhabitants butchered. At present, Raymond VII's truce with Louis IX and Blanche is holding, but the Church is still suspicious of Raymond and actively trying to search out the active Cathars.

There are strong links between Toulouse and Outremer. Count Raymond IV was a wealthy member of the First Crusade who led a large force of knights. Raymond's kin became the Counts of Tripoli and were active in several crusades. Some crusaders may have been Embraced by eastern clans and returned home thereafter. Cainites themselves may feel the urge to

go on crusade. Cainite crusaders in Outremer may have mortal contacts or descendants in Toulouse and return to aid them, or to help the Church destroy the heretics during the Albigensian Crusade.

Toulouse is slowly rebuilding from the Albigensian Crusade. A new cathedral-fortress and bishop's palace are being planned in Albi. (The old cathedral was destroyed during the crusade.) Construction on a new cathedral for Béziers has been ongoing since 1215. Blanche of Castile has been building a royal residence in Carcassonne since 1226. Nîmes' cathedral, damaged in the Crusades, is undergoing repairs.

Cainites in Toulouse need to tread lightly. Friar-inquisitors and clergy are busy looking for heretics. The populace is wary of strangers and unlikely to shelter anyone who may bring trouble. The areas still held by Count Raymond-Roger IV may accept refugees who claim to be Cathars, but their resources are overburdened, and tensions are high. In 1229, the populace of Cordes lynches a group of inquisitors.

Cainites may journey to Toulouse as crusaders, Cathar refugees or as part of several factions who have used the cover of the Crusades to settle old feuds, raid rivals or just seek personal power. Cainite scholars may also come to Toulouse to study at the renowned medical school in Montpellier or at the newly chartered university in Toulouse.

Life in France

The following sections detail some of the unique aspects of life in France, such as the fairs and the universities. Whatever the mortal populace does, however, the Cainites of France look on with interest, and very often a mortal trend or custom is quickly adopted — and perverted — by the undead.

The Champagne Fairs

Far from the battlefields of Toulouse, Cainites gather at the Champagne Fairs to meet, trade and negotiate. The fairs are a haven for Cainites of the Low Clans, for Prometheans and Furores and for those who seek power through a merchant's wealth.

Every year, thousands of merchants from across Western Europe gather together in four cities in Champagne — Lagny (January-February), Bar-sur-Aube (March-April), Troyes (July-August and November-December) and Provins (September-October) — for five weeks each to trade goods, credit and currency. Thousands of anonymous strangers crowd into cities swelling the usual population of roughly 10,000 souls.



Fairs are some of the few places in Europe where a strange face does not cause comment, where business may be done at any hour and where Cainites from very different lands may meet on neutral territory. Who would notice careful feeding?

Actually, Eudes de Troyes, leader of a group of Prometheans who have protected the fairs since the 1150s, notices. Eudes travels with the fairs and keeps a close eye on activities. The fairs are open territory where Cainites who disdain the Toreador courts can gather safely. Feeding must be discreet, and Embracing progeny is forbidden. Duels and conflicts must be fought outside the fairgrounds. Eudes has little power to enforce his will outside the fairgrounds, but through his mortal counterparts he can put significant fiscal pressure on a prince's merchants by restricting their rights to trade at the fair.

When in Troyes, Eudes keeps an even lower profile as Hélène's court usually sits in this city. Hélène's interests are politics both mortal and undead on a national scale—the affairs of Eudes and of merchants are generally beneath her notice—which is exactly as Eudes prefers it.

The fairs' Promethean guardians may be beneath the notice of Queen Hélène le Juste, but they are critically important to her mortal counterpart, Count Thibault IV, as they provide significant revenue to his court. King Louis IX has placed merchants traveling to and from the fairs under his personal protection. In addition, the mortal authorities will bar any merchant from a city or barony that has not paid its debts to the fair, or has unjustly harmed another merchant, until the offending city or baron makes good the debt or harm.

The fairs themselves are virtually independent states. Champagne sets very low fees and taxes on the merchants. Two Keepers of the Fairs, a chancellor, notaries, lieutenants and 100 sergeants govern the fairs. Any two officials can make important decisions, aided as necessary by *Prudhommes* (honorable/important merchants) from the trades. Contracts and letters of credit drawn up at the fairs are valid anywhere in Christian Europe (in theory).

The merchants who attend the fairs often have their own organized companies that travel, live and work together. These companies have their own officers, including captains to lead the company, consuls to represent members in dealing with fair officials and harbingers to arrange the company's accommodations before the merchants arrive. Crossbow archers and pikemen guard the caravans. Traveling in a guarded caravan is one of the safest ways for a Cainite to travel in Europe.

The Champagne Fairs are the largest and best known of the major French fairs, but they are not the only ones. Nearly every town has at least one trade fair, often held on its saint's day or the anniversary of the consecration of its major church. Paris is one of the few to have two major fairs — each lasting a month. Local princes may attempt to restrict hunting at their local fairs, or they may allow a certain amount of feeding during the usual drunkenness, brawling, whoring and rioting that accompany these gatherings. For many Cainites of noble birth, what the merchants and peasants do to each other is simply beneath their notice.

The Cathedral Crusade

Near and dear to the Toreador Queens' hearts is the construction of Gothic cathedrals in Northern France. One of the most famous cathedrals — Notre-Dame de Paris — is over half complete. New cathedrals are just being started in Amiens, Reims and other cities. Cathedral architects, window makers and sculptors struggle to make their cathedrals wider, taller or more ornate than their neighbors and predecessors. Toreador patrons and artisans, especially Queen Isouda de Blaise, whose prized Notre-Dame de Chartres was finished in 1220, are at the very heart of this competition.

The competition is not entirely benign. Construction on several new cathedrals began when fires destroyed the old buildings. Suspensions circulate that not all of the fires were accidental, that a few conveniently cleared a building site for an ambitious new bishop. Cathedral chapters compete for the best artisans and materials, and rumors of sabotage are not uncommon. Woe to an ambitious bishop or architect who thoughtlessly destroys or alters a Toreador's masterpiece. A true *artiste* would never destroy the achievement of a cathedral, although one might be tempted to rid oneself of an eyesore or clear the canvas for an even greater work (and true art, is, as always, in the eye of the beholder). Less aesthetically minded Cainites might not be so scrupulous. Destroying a rival's cathedral after decades or centuries of effort is a vicious revenge, or corrupting it with clashing renovations while a rival is in torpor. Supervising repairs alone could distract a rival for decades or longer.

Medieval Cathedrals

The scale of a medieval cathedral building is huge, both as a whole and individually. From

Major French cathedrals under construction in 1230


Amiens	1220-1410
Bourges: Saint Etienne	1195-1255
Coutances	1218-1371
LeMans: Saint Julien	1217-1254
Paris: Saint Denis Basilica	1136-1281
Paris: Notre Dame	1164-1250
Poitiers: St-Pierre	c1150-1379
Rheims	1211-1270
Senlis: Notre-Dame	1191-1560
Troyes: St-Pierre-et-St-Paul	1208-1554

1050 to 1350, parishes in northern France build 80 cathedrals, 500 large churches and tens of thousands of parish churches. The cathedral of Amiens is large enough for the city's entire population of 10,000 to attend services at the same time. A 14-story building could be built in the choir of St-Pierre de Beauvais cathedral without touching the vaults, some 157 feet high. The cathedral fad has spread, to a lesser extent, to England, Germany and Italy.

Medieval cathedrals are loud, festive, brightly colored places full of pilgrims and pageants. The altars are gilded with ornate altar cloths. The great crosses are decorated with precious stones. Chalices, reliquaries and even bishop's crosiers are themselves masterworks of art. High altars, rood screens and choir stalls will all be removed from many cathedrals during renovations in later centuries. Multicolored wall hangings, paint and decorated paving all are missing from cathedrals in the modern age.

A cathedral is not simply used during services and left empty the rest of the time. Parishioners eat there, sleep there and come to Mass with their prized hunting birds and dogs. During fairs, churches set guards to catch lovers in the dark corners. Communes and guilds hold meetings in cathedrals and smaller churches. Parish churches are even used as storehouses at the height of the harvest.

The first 250 years of cathedral building is a time of great strides in architecture and ornamentation — when cathedrals developed walls of stained glass. Not all of these experiments succeed, though. Beauvais' vaults are the highest attempted, and they partly collapse in 1284, leaving the cathedral incomplete to this night.



Construction is a massive, expensive project. Bishops and chapters vie with neighbors for funds and artisans. Relics are bought, stolen and displayed to draw pilgrims and their alms. Struggles between a bishop and the cathedral chapter (the monks who perform Masses) or between a bishop and the town can starve a cathedral for funds. Good relations with guilds, local nobles and the crown can bring donations and patronage. A change in architect, overseer of the fabric (construction), works accountant or director of the site can likewise bring chaos, or a new vision perhaps not wholly compatible with the old.

Toreador are drawn to cathedral building but they must be wary. Cathedrals are home to bishops and parishioners who may exhibit True Faith. Followers of the Road of Heaven often seek cathedrals and their chapters. They are often home to a great many relics, not all of which are fakes. The great stained glass and rose windows are glorious achievements that vampires cannot admire in daylight.

Universities

In 1230, bishops also have to contend with a growing number of scholars from France's three universities — Paris, Toulouse and Montpellier. (By the end of the century, a university is chartered in Orléans.) Although the universities grew out of the cathedral schools, they have been recognized by the Papacy as legally independent from the bishop's control.

Universities draw mortal and Cainite students and scholars from across Europe to study, teach, debate and philosophize. The students and teachers are almost without exception male, although occasionally a master's daughter is allowed to sit in some classes. Most are minor members of the clergy, whose moral character has been attested by the bishop of their home diocese. The students are mostly in their early teens, with a reputation for drunken riots on feast and fair days. Troubadours describe students as rowdy mischievous rogues, all too fond of wine and sexual adventures, escaping punishment through their privileges as clergy. Wealthy students' lay servants share their masters' privileges and are often considered worse than the students themselves. Servants are rumored to cheat their masters by overcharging them for purchases and services.

The University of Paris was given its charter by Philippe II Auguste in 1200. Pope Innocent recognized its rights in 1208-09. In 1215, a papal legate gave the University's guild of masters and students their own statutes. The students and masters are currently in the middle of a two year strike, called in 1229, after Blanche of Castile and a papal legate tried to discipline students for invading a Parisian nunnery and raping several nuns. The university ultimately upholds its absolute right to discipline the students and is given explicit protection by the Papacy.

The University of Toulouse was founded in 1229 as part of the Papacy's effort to re-establish orthodox theology in the county. Despite the Church's strong influence, students in Toulouse can study with Jewish scholars who survived the Albigensian Crusade. Other Jewish and Muslim scholars are drawn to Toulouse, bringing with them classical Greek works, including Aristotle's writings that are banned in Paris as theologically dangerous.

Montpellier's renowned school of medicine was founded by Jewish scholars in 1000. The medical school became part of a university founded by Benedictine monks. Pope Nicholas IV grants the university a charter in 1289. As Montpellier is on the Mediterranean coast near trade routes with the Muslim states, it is one of the first places to receive many Greek texts that have been preserved and translated by Arab scholars.

A university is another place where strangers can gather and Cainite scholars can seek lost works and dispute philosophical questions. It is difficult for a Cainite to study at a university, though, since classes are given during the days, often in church buildings or outdoors when the weather permits. Students are mostly minor clergy, and some may exhibit True Faith. Books are more common than in earlier decades, but most teachers lecture by reading verbatim from authoritative texts chained to heavy pillars to prevent theft. Universities technically fall under the domain of the prince of the city, but the prince may appoint a learned representative to oversee the school. Since human mages also frequent universities, Cainites need to be adept at hiding themselves from mystical scrutiny. The Cappadocians and Brujah often fill this representative post, although the Tremere usually send a representative of their interests.

Notable Cainites

Esclarmonde the Black, Queen of Toulouse

7th-generation Toreador, childe of Michel d'Armand, Walker on the Road of Kings

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Defender

Embrace: AD 729

Apparent Age: early 40s



In better years, Queen Esclarmonde's court echoed with song and music. The finest minstrels and troubadours of northern Spain, Toulouse and Provence played at her court for her guests. Cathars, Christians, Jews, Moors, High and Low Clans were equally welcome at her court. Talent was more important than any other quality.

King Etienne expected Esclarmonde to fold at the first brush of the Crusade. Her swift response, skilled diplomacy, and martial skill surprised her peers and rivals. Her peers were equally surprised at her willingness to seek allies among the Spanish Lasombra and the Low Clans, and to intentionally provoke conflicts between the Cainite Crusaders and the Lupines.

A few older Cainites recalled that she had been Embraced during Abd-erRahman's campaign against the Franks between 729 and 732. She fought against Moorish

Cainites for most of her early decades, before the region was stable enough to enjoy the finer arts of life.

Esclarmonde has spent most of her unlife playing the shifting politics of Aquitaine, Toulouse and Aragon. The Court of Love was a small change from longstanding Toulousian traditions. She found her Frankish peers comparatively crude, and maintained a nominal link to Salianna and the other Queens. Although initially blind-sided by the crusade and Salianna's treachery, she is rapidly gathering allies and secrets to take the struggle to their door.

Eudes de Troyes, Champion of the Fairs

8th-generation Brujah, childe of Volker, Walker on the Road of Humanity

Nature: Caretaker

Demeanor: Caretaker

Embrace: AD 1012

Apparent Age: late 20s



Eudes was Embraced for his skills as a merchant and diplomat. His sire, a Flemish Brujah from Ghent, merely expected a competent local pawn. Eudes quickly proved himself adept at managing affairs at the fairs and soon was a valued local agent for many of the Cainites who visited them.

Eudes gathered like-minded Cainites around himself and slowly monopolized arrangements for traveling Cainites and their entourages. He used that trust and respect to gain independence from his sire and take charge of the fairs. Because Eudes maintains strict impartiality toward his clients and their dealings, he is a respected arbitrator. It is in no one's interest to challenge his protection of the fairs, as he provides a safe haven for anyone who follows his rules.

He respects the power of nobles, and is grateful for the counts' long protection of the fairs. He despises nobles who prey on merchants and moneylenders when their own profligacy and folly bring them to near ruin. Similarly Cainites who have no sense for money or practicality, who are frivolous, gluttonous or wasteful will earn his scorn.

Eudes does his best to avoid Cainite politics, especially the whirl of intrigue that surrounds Queen Hélène's court. He reluctantly gets involved in Cainite politics only when plots and plans threaten to disrupt his fair and his supporters.

Saint Regis, Prince of Marseilles

8th-generation Toreador, childe of Nathaniel, Walker on the Road of Heaven

Nature: Penitent

Demeanor: Penitent

Embrace: AD 1074

Apparent Age: mid 20s

Brother Regis was a monk in Abbey of Saint Victor when he was Embraced while accompanying the abbot on one of his many embassies for Pope Gregory VII. He escaped from his Sinner sire and returned to the Abbey, seeking to expunge his newly cursed condition through prayer and penitence. Regis accompanied crusaders to Outremer, visited Rome and even spent three decades as a Carthusian monk, but he could not find solace. His intentions are good, but his will is often weak. Each time he has tried to find peace, he has eventually succumbed to temptation and a binge of feeding, violence and depravity.

After leaving the Convent de la Grande Chartreuse, he returned to Marseilles. He found his beloved Abbey of Saint Victor being slowly corrupted by the local prince and decided to take action. Regis approached the Order of the Bitter Ashes at Les Baux and at Tarascon and Cainites in the Hospitaler and Templar commands in Provence for aid, and he promised them that if he were prince, he would aid the crusaders traveling from Marseilles. With their aid, he was able to ambush Marseilles's prince and take the city for himself. Local Cainites nicknamed him "Saint" Regis for his efforts at redemption. Regis himself does not use the name, as he feels that doing so would be the height of pride, but he has made no effort to stop its use by others.

Regis finds peace in his gardens, which he has decorated with restored Roman mosaics, statues and other works made in a Roman style. He keenly appreciates the irony of his hobby, comparing it to Queen Isouda de Blaise's love for the stained glass of Chartres which she can never see.

Regis has little respect for the higher clergy, as the papal politics he saw during his mortal years left him



deeply cynical. He does, on the other hand, protect monks, especially those of the Abbey of Saint Victor, and is intrigued by the new Dominican and Franciscan orders. If he tires of Marseilles, he may try his hand at pretending to the life of a Franciscan.

As prince, he is a practical ruler. He was impressed with what he has learned of Blanche of Castile and Louis IX, and he would not mind seeing Marseilles become part of the royal domain. He has distanced himself from the politics of the Grand Court and the Courts of Love. He has remained neutral to efforts to involve him in the Albigensian Crusade, but does hunt Cathar refugees he finds in his city.

His power in Marseilles is rooted in his ties to the Order of Bitter Ashes, Cainite Templars and Hospitalers, and their need for Marseilles as a supply port for Constantinople and Outremer. He, himself, is skeptical about whether the crusaders can capture and hold Jerusalem, but he is willing to support others in their martyrdom.

The local Furores chafe at his pious insistence on feeding only from laymen and not clergy, women or children, and they openly struggle with him and his clerical supporters. Local Ravnos are equally frustrated by his piety, but they prefer to tempt Regis into indulging his Beast, knowing that he will then be thereafter distracted by efforts at penance.

Regis most recently fell from his road when tempted by the youths of the Children's Crusade. He killed several and took others as ghouls. When he then retreated to his garden in despair, a pair of Ravnos Sybarites took advantage of his distraction to sell many of the remaining children into slavery in Egypt. Other children escaped to Genoa. Saint Regis has emerged from his melancholy and is determined to track down and slay those who led him into temptation, and woe be to any Cainite whom he suspects of collusion with them.



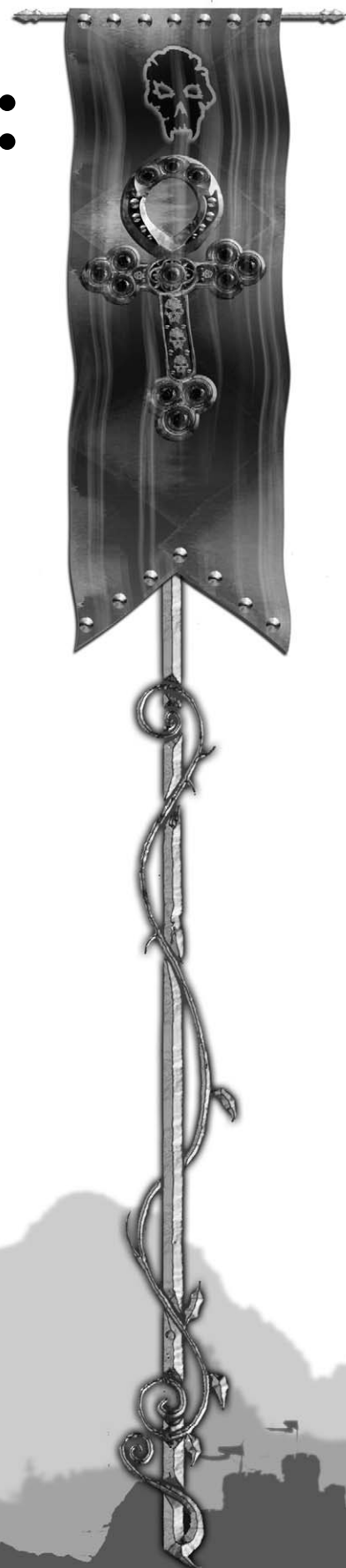


CHAPTER THREE: THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

“The Holy Roman Empire must remain safely in Ventrue hands. We must not tolerate criticism of our traditional ways from our own ranks. It is our duty to stop this and to guarantee the safety of all Cainites within the Holy Roman Empire.”

—Hardestadt the Elder, in a speech before Mithras of London

In 1230, the Holy Roman Empire is by far the largest European power. Since the end of the 12th century, it encompasses the kingdoms of Germany and Italy as well as the hereditary Kingdom of Sicily. Lower Italy is part of the latter, so the Papal State lies embedded between two regions belonging to the empire in Middle Italy. The Arabian rulers of Tunis and Tripoli pay tribute to the empire. The kings of Cyprus and Armenia have forsworn their oath of fealty to the Byzantine Empire to be taken under the Holy Roman Empire’s wing. It truly is the center of power in Europe in the 13th century.



MORTALS

Frederick II — Holy Roman Emperor, King of Sicily and Naples. An ambitious, scheming monarch recently returned from Outremer and considering his options in Northern Italy.

Henry VII — King of Germany. Grandson of Henry VI, Son of Emperor Frederick II and Constance of Aragon. Will soon oppose his father and revolt openly in 1232.

Gregory IX — Pope. Reformer and politician interested in expanding and consolidating papal power in Italy. Ally of Frederick II who keeps his hand off Germany in exchange for multiple concessions in Italy.

Hermann von Salza — Grandmaster of the Teutonic Order. This pious man led his order's exodus east in 1226. Salza is intent on founding a state in the east for the Teutonic Knights to rule.

CAINITES

Montano — (4th-generation Lasombra) First childe of the clan founder of the Magisters. He rules the *Castel d'Ombro*, his clan's main seat on the island of Sicily. Head of the *Amici Noctis*.

Hardestadt the Elder — (5th-generation Ventrue) German member of the Clan of Kingship hailing from Bavaria; the single predominant Cainite in the Holy Roman Empire. His status has brought him many enemies, and he has survived several attempts to end his unlfe.

Julia Antasia — (5th-generation Ventrue) Head of the Antasian faction in Frankfurt. She is a Cainite from the Roman Empire who sees her clan differently than other Patricians — mainly as lorekeepers, not as leaders of the Cainite race. A paragon of the Road of Humanity.

Lotharius — (5th-generation Tremere) Prince of Vienna; together with Etrius, he is the keeper of Tremere's torpid body.

Lord Jürgen of Magdeburg — (6th-generation Ventrue) Prince of Magdeburg and childe of Hardestadt.

Lucius Cornelius Scipio — (6th-generation Brujah) Promethean born and sired in the Roman Empire. Leader of a coterie of mercantile Brujah and other Cainites that back up the Hanseatic League. Believes he can build a new Carthage in Northern Germany.

Penelope — (7th-generation Cappadocian) Former Spartan slave from ancient Rome. Lucius's former lover and long-time ally; a staunch believer in the Promethean ideal.

A Historical Overview

When Emperor Frederick I, also known as Barbarossa ("Red-Beard"), died under mysterious circumstances in 1190, the Holy Roman Empire he had led to new heights of power came into an era of both growth and constant change. Barbarossa, the emperor who had ruled by force, drowned on the Third Crusade in the vicinity of a town called Saleph in Asia Minor. Myth and gossip of all sorts soon surrounded him, and he is said to sleep in the Kyffhäuser Mountain. According to legend, the ravens that circle his resting-place will awake him when it is time to return, that is when his empire is in the direst of needs.

The Return of the Red-Bearded Emperor

Barbarossa's successor, Henry VI, unified the Holy Roman Empire with Italy. Under his reign, the empire was at the summit of its power. In 1194, he conquered the Kingdom of Sicily and became King of the Normans — a daring move possibly inspired by his clandestine supporters, the Norman faction of Ventrue headed by Mithras. They received help from the German Ventrue led by

Hardestadt and his childe, Lord Jürgen of Magdeburg. When the emperor they were protecting finally moved into Sicily, the Patricians saw their chance to strike against the heartland of their Lasombra enemies.

But Henry VI died unexpectedly in 1198, and so both clans sought to establish their own candidate as the new emperor. Both Philip of Schwaben (Barbarossa's son), and the Guelph Otto IV of Brunswick were elected King of Germany. The former was the one the German Ventrue preferred to see as Henry's successor, as he stood for a reign that was free from clerical influence. Otto IV, however, was loyal to the papacy, and he enjoyed clandestine support from the Lasombra rooted within the Church. (For a closer look at the corresponding factions among the kine, the Guelphs and Ghibellines, see Chapter Five.) When Philip died before the end of AD 1198, all mortal factions recognized Otto's kingship. But the German Ventrue were not so easily appeased.

Otto IV received the emperor's crown from the pope in Rome in 1209, but he made the mistake of attacking Sicily only a year later. Immediately, Pope Innocent III excommunicated him and the Lasombra withdrew the support they had secretly granted him.

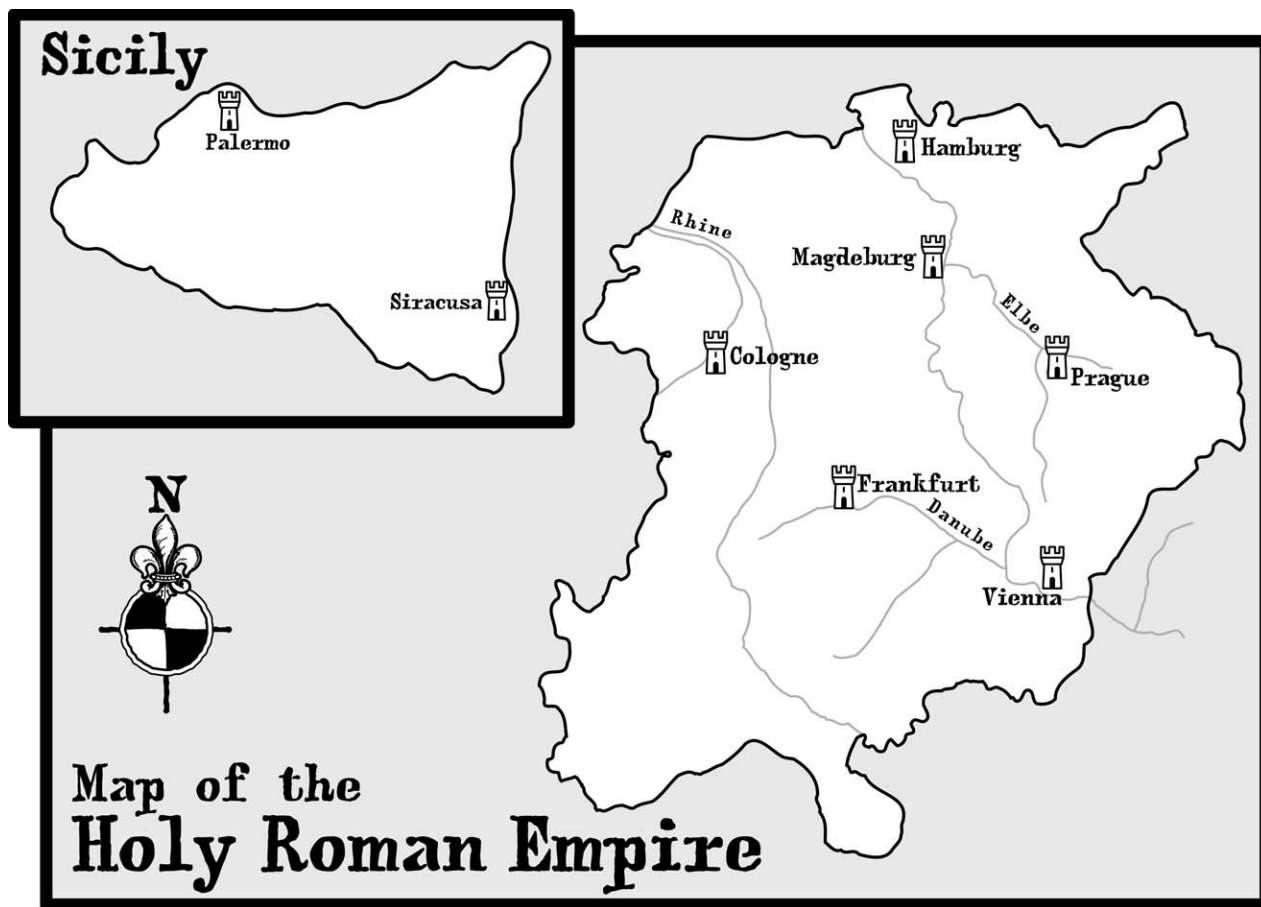
In 1212, the German princes elected Frederick II King of Germany. His crowning took place in Frankfurt, under the watchful eye of the moderate Ventrue faction called the Antasians. In the same year, the Children's Crusade led by the 10-year-old Nikolaus from Cologne shook the empire. This disaster cost the Holy Roman Empire an estimated 20,000 children. In the Cainite society, the prince of the city at the Rhine, the Ventrue Giseler, banned Clan Lasombra from his domain because he saw (or imagined) the Magisters' hand behind the boy's folly. Giseler was never able to prove that Nikolaus's visions of his duty to collect other children and reclaim the Holy Land were some clever Lasombra ruse, but the suspicion was enough of an excuse for the Ventrue to move against his political enemies while he had a chance.

While the populace commonly saw Frederick II, with his strong family resemblance to his famous grandfather, as the reborn Barbarossa come to lead his empire to glory once again, he was actually a man who bought his peace and success by making extensive concessions to the Church. Where his grandfather had shown the world the face of a war-like ruler at odds with the pope, Frederick II was a man who preferred diplomacy and even sacrifices of personal power to open conflict. His rule was based

on the example of the tightly organized, clearly structured political system of his beloved Kingdom of Sicily, the home of his mother.

Pope Innocent III, Frederick II's guardian, died before Frederick had been crowned in Rome. To get the new Pope Honorius III's support, Frederick promised not to declare Sicily simply some part of the imperial territory but to keep it a separate kingdom that belonged to the Holy Roman Empire. Therefore, Sicily retained a considerable amount of freedom. This was an important concession to the Italian rulers and the Guelphs as a whole. In 1213, Frederick's Golden Bull of Eger confirmed the concessions that Otto IV had made to the Church for fear of antagonizing the influential clerical lords of his Empire. Otto — who sorely felt the absence of his former unseen supporters — tried to maintain his rule for a while, but he and the Guelphs were decisively defeated in the Battle of Bouvines. Otto died powerless in the city of Harzburg in 1218.

Frederick II wanted his son, Henry VII, to become King of Germany, so he himself could finally withdraw to Sicily. He was aware, though, that he could not attain this goal without the Church's aid. He gained its support by granting the German clerical lords even more rights in 1220, such as market, minting and toll rights as





well as jurisdiction. This action increased the Church's worldly, political power even more and lessened the influence of the respective worldly rulers.

Honorius honored Frederick's repeated concession of privileges to the Church by officially crowning him in Rome in 1220. The emperor in turn promised to start a new crusade. Finally, Frederick II moved to Sicily to take up permanent residence there after declaring his son King of Germany.

In 1227, Frederick went on the promised Fifth Crusade to re-conquer the Holy Land, but he had to turn back due to a plague. He reached northern Italy by the end of spring, only to come across villages filled with sick and dying people wasting away amidst the bloated bodies of others whom the plague had claimed days before. Black abscesses covered the bodies of the infected, and swollen, purple tongues lolled out of the mouths of the corpses. This outbreak of the plague that the mortals soon dubbed the Bulbous Death ravaged entire areas of the empire before dying down as suddenly as it had sprung up. Of course, whispered rumors told of villagers worshipping infernal entities and forming unholy pacts. The swarms of ugly black flies crawling over the festering corpses reminded every faithful Christian of the works of the Lord of the Flies, the Corrupter. The few Cainites who saw it and were knowledgeable enough shivered as their minds leapt to legends of the feared Baali. But although the Vatican sent several clerical delegations to inquire, no proof for any in-

fernal machinations was ever found. Still, the unexpected wave of this hitherto unknown species of plague kept the emperor from honoring his word at first.

Angry about the interrupted crusade and in need to establish himself as a worthy successor to the politically powerful Honorius, the newly appointed Pope Gregory IX took the opportunity to excommunicate the emperor. In the following year, though, Frederick made a second attempt to make good on his promise, and he actually headed the Fifth Crusade this time in spite of the ban. It ended in 1230, bringing Jerusalem back into Christian hands by means of a treaty between the emperor and Sultan al-Kamil. Frederick II added the title King of Jerusalem to his impressive list of honors. After returning to the Holy Roman Empire, the ban against him was lifted, and in return, the pope received special clerical rights in Sicily where the emperor again took up residence.

This is the political landscape in which Cainites of the Holy Roman Empire move during the War of Princes. Frederick II still rules the Holy Roman Empire, and he remains on the throne until his death in 1250. Although the emperor is far away in Sicily, seemingly aloof, and the Church is strong on the continent, Frederick's loyal son Henry rules as king in his place. Germany is a place of relative calm, peace and continuity, largely because of the emperor's unparalleled long reign with its continuous jurisdiction, stable living conditions and absence of large-scale conflicts.

Still, Frederick II's long reign assures stability only in the realm of the kine — the War of Princes rages in the realm of Cainites. Their conflicts are often a consequence of the important events in the lives of the kine around them, as much as they would like to believe otherwise.

The Clan of Kingship

As far as the Children of Caine are concerned, the entire Holy Roman Empire is the domain of Clan Ventrue, and it has been for many years. The Patricians have been an important influence behind German rulers dating back to Charlemagne, if not longer. Many Ventrue of varying importance make permanent havens in the Holy Roman Empire in the era of the War of Princes. No other Cainite clan, faction or coterie can successfully get a foothold in the Holy Roman Empire if the Patricians do not allow it and no one dares oppose their rule. That, at least, is the façade that Clan Ventrue presents to the outside world.

Factions of the Ventrue

It is not altogether true, though, as many other Cainites have found their way into the Holy Roman Empire. Cainites from the upper echelons of undead society have no problem finding their place at some Ventrue court as long as they do not contest the local prince's status. The Low Clans tend to keep to rural areas or stay on the move, shying away from Cainite courts and shunning the attention of the rulers of the night. The Prometheans have a power base in Hamburg where they support the Hanseatic League. Knights of the Bitter Ashes travel the land acting as examples for the Road of Kings. Some important followers of the Road of Sin reside in Sicily, trying to infect those close to the emperor (or, if rumors are to be believed, Frederick himself), and the Nosferatu hide in leper colonies, covertly helping those terminally sick outcasts — or helping them die. The Ventrue are not really as omnipresent in the Holy Roman Empire as they would like other Cainites to believe.

Additionally, the unshakable interior unity of the Ventrue is little more than a clever ruse. The Patricians pretend to speak with one voice and deny any disagreements within their ranks. This ostensibly united Ventrue front is deeply split, however, into two very different schools of thought.

The Patriarchs

No one is sure if the ruthless Cainites led by Hardestadt chose this name for themselves or if their political enemies first used the sobriquet. The Patriarchs are not really a faction, but rather a loose assembly of like-minded Cainites mainly from the ranks of the Ventrue. Of course,

members of other High Clans, share many of their ideas and support them in words and deeds. Even many Lasombra would share their opinions on central political, moral and social issues, the ages-old enmity between the two clans notwithstanding. Indeed, even members of the Low Clans who follow the Road of Kings might have political views similar to the Patriarchs. But in the Holy Roman Empire, all the important Patriarchs are Ventrue.

The Patriarchs are proud of the history of their clan, and they constantly remind others of its glorious past (and present). They regard any form of change as a threat since the old ways have always served these Cainites best and there is no real need to change them. Agents of change, therefore, are regarded as highly suspicious. The Patriarchs see themselves as the true nobility of the night. The clan founder is considered the Dark Father's favorite grandchilde, and from this special relationship, the Ventrue infer that their unique role within Cainite society is to lead. Theirs is a hard rule but a just one, and the resistance of other Cainites of the empire to the Ventrue's right to command often confuses them.

The Patriarch's power base in AD 1230 is Magdeburg where Lord Jürgen, childe of their central figure Hardestadt, rules as prince.

The Antasians

The opposition to Hardestadt's and Jürgen of Magdeburg's Patriarchs is situated in Frankfurt. Influenced by the ideals of the Methuselah Julia Antasia, Ventrue gather here to revive the old traditions of the Eternal Senate. Julia is a paragon of the Road of Humanity, embodying its principles in everything she does or says. Her political goals for the Antasians — who are, in truth, nothing but a large coterie of devout Prodigals — are cooperation on an equal level and mutual protection. Every member has the same status. Anyone may step up at the annual gatherings and voice opinions; everyone has one vote and is accorded the same time to make his point. The use of the blood-borne gifts of Caine and especially the force of the blood oath deeply contradict the ideals of this faction and are punished.

The Antasians are a recently founded faction consisting only of Cainites on the Road of Humanity. Julia Antasia regards the works of Rome, politically and otherwise, as the shining achievement of man and believes that those works would have endured had the undead not made the city their playground. It is for this reason that she is wary of listening to Cainites who walk other roads, especially Scions and Sinners. She will grant her time to the Faithful, but feels that the Road of Heaven is nothing more than a specialized offshoot of her own road (though she is careful not to voice this belief, lest she offend).

In the eyes of other Ventrue of the Holy Roman Empire — and especially in the eyes of Hardestadt — the Antasians are a group of aloof idealists who don't know what it means to be Prodigals. Clinging to the ideal of Rome is a ridiculous effort with no chance to succeed, seeing as how the very ideals they uphold failed once before. Additionally, the idea that everyone should have an equal voice is contrary not only to tradition, but to God's natural order. Hardestadt demands that the Antasians should accept the new role the Road of Humanity has to play these nights — to walk among mortals as the eyes and ears of the Scions.

The Antasians themselves face an uncertain future. They are mostly young Cainites (their powerful patron-ess aside) who can demonstrate neither great power nor vast influence. In the nights to come, however, many young Prodigals journey to Frankfurt to join the faction or learn from Julia Antasia.

The Patrician Gambit

The fact that both factions are forced to show the outside world a united face makes their internal rivalries all the more bitter. Julia Antasia has labeled the tenuous stalemate situation that the two factions have reached by

HARDESTADT'S TRAVELING COURT

Every year, the head of the Patriarchs embarks on a journey through the Holy Roman Empire to hold court in the most important domains at regular intervals. He stays one or two months in any given city to take care of the problems his allies have in their respective domains. When the time he has scheduled for the sojourn is over, or if all problems brought to his attention are settled, he travels on to the next domain. He habitually spends the last two months of the year in his Bavarian castle. There he sorts through the extensive notes he takes on his journeys and prepares the route for next year's traveling court.

The fact that Hardestadt follows Emperor Charlemagne's example in this habit of holding court is not only proof that he is steeped in tradition, it also shows that he knows exactly how many enemies lurk in the empire. Being a traveling potentate and never staying in one place for too long makes him extremely hard to pin down for any potential enemy who wants to assail him. It also grants him the flexibility to show up anywhere at any given crucial moment and use his political leverage to bend things his way.

now “the Patrician Gambit.” Careful not to admit any dissent to outsiders, the moderate Antasians and their Patriarch counterparts engage in a cold war of covert but painful blows, fighting for dominance in the Holy Roman Empire (all the while desperately trying not to unsettle the balance of power too much). Both groups feel that a major shift in this balance of power must not happen before the time is right to strike a decisive blow against the rival faction. If it happens too soon, it may provide a potential opening for other factions, clans or roads to ascend to power within the empire, a development both factions abhor and want to avoid.

Two further problems add to the crisis that the German Ventrue face. One is the fact that the worldly power within the Holy Roman Empire gradually crumbles under the reign of Emperor Frederick II. This process, marked in the mortal world by the seemingly endless war between the Guelphs and the Ghibellines and by the immense concessions and grants of rights Frederick II makes to the Church, strengthens clerical power within the empire. A more frightening effect, as far as the Patricians are concerned, is that the growing power of the Church also cements the Magisters' influence in the empire. The only significant countermove by the Ventrue is their concerted effort to ingrain themselves even deeper within the Church. The figurehead of this effort is Fabrizio Ulfila, the Aryan bishop-turned-Ventrue who will one day become the decisive vampiric power behind the terrible Inquisition. In the 13th century, though, he resides in Bologna, trying to influence the Dominican Order to his clan's favor (see page 109).

The second and even bigger problem is that the situation of the German Ventrue is mirrored on a larger scale by the clan's internal struggles throughout Europe. The European Ventrue front crumbles. Alexander, the former Prince of Paris, has been ousted from his seat and replaced by his own child, Geoffrey, with the support of the Toreador Matriarch Salianna. The French Patrician elder took refuge in Magdeburg, which worries Hardestadt and Lord Jürgen, as they are sure that he will not suffer his exile quietly.

In the end, the Holy Roman Empire's Ventrue might find themselves forced to do battle on too many fronts during the War of Princes, which might ultimately prove to be the end of their ages-old predominance in the heart of Europe.

Domains of the Ventrue

While it is by no means the only powerful clan in the Holy Roman Empire, Clan Ventrue certainly claim the largest amount of domain. The three major centers of Ventrue power in the empire are Magdeburg, Frankfurt and Cologne. While Lord Jürgen and Hardestadt command more troops and are much bet-

THE EXILED PRINCE

Alexander's forced sojourn in Magdeburg is one of the effects of the power struggles within the upper echelons of Clan Ventrue. The French Patrician ruled in Paris for a long time until Geoffrey and Salianna's successful coup (see Chapter Two).

Now Alexander lies low in Magdeburg, licking his wounds and recovering his pride. Lord Jürgen fears that he might have come to usurp Magdeburg after having lost his own long-time domain. Jürgen might not be able to stop Alexander if he chose this course of action, and even if he could, domain and city alike would certainly suffer tremendously. Thus, he treads carefully around his renowned guest and tries to determine his plans.

In reality, Alexander couldn't care less for Magdeburg as anything other than a place to hide. All his thoughts and plans revolve around re-conquering his beloved Paris, which is why he has come to the Elbe. Alexander is looking to gain allies with which to oust Salianna and his treasonous childe Geoffrey, and he grows less choosy about the origins and motives of those allies with each passing year.

ter organized, the Antasians and their supporters hold power in Frankfurt and Cologne, and then could put a great deal of pressure on the Patriarchs if necessary. A battle between the factions, should it ever come to that, would have an uncertain conclusion, particularly if other clans took sides.

Magdeburg: City Under the Black Cross

The city on the Elbe is the power base of the Patriarchs. Although Hardestadt leads this faction, he does not reside in Magdeburg. His main haven is the remote Bavarian castle of his mortal birth, but he is rarely found holding court there, having adopted the traveling court style of earlier German rulers. Hardestadt is deeply involved in internal power struggles of the Patricians concerning all of Europe, so he leaves the fate of the northeast Holy Roman Empire to his childe Jürgen of Magdeburg. Since he himself is usually present in the southern half of the empire, the Patriarchs have the empire in a kind of pincer-grip.

Magdeburg, the capital of Brandenburg, lies in an area called the Magdeburg Börde, a fertile, lush region on the northern border of the Harz Mountains. The city was first mentioned in an official document as "Magadoburg" in 805 in Charlemagne's *Diensthofen Capitular*. The village

lay at the crossroads of two large trade routes with the river Elbe, which proved beneficial for its growth. A small castle fortified the settlement. In those nights, the Brujah Cedric built his lonely haven there and later declared himself prince as the city rose to prominence. For centuries, Cedric was the only Cainite of note in the area.

This suddenly challenged in 1131, when an unknown Lasombra Embraced Norbert von Xanten, the Archbishop of Magdeburg. The power-hungry priest soon became an equally ruthless Cainite whose influence in the area rivaled that of the prince.

In spring of 1188, a huge conflagration devastated Magdeburg and claimed Cedric's unlife. In the course of the enormous rebuilding measures starting later that year, Archbishop Wichmann granted full city privileges to Magdeburg. On the vampiric level, Lord Jürgen, former advisor to Cedric, followed him on the throne of the prince. As soon as his power was secured, he banned Norbert from his domain. The Lasombra did not go far, though. He moved to Brunswick, the first major city that did not fall under Jürgen's sway. Norbert von Xanten claimed domain in that city and has been a thorn in Jürgen's side ever since.

When Jürgen returned from Hungary in 1222 (see **Under the Black Cross**), he concentrated on stabilizing his domestic power base. He surrounded himself by a primogen and allowed the Nosferatu, the Toreador and his own clan to name a representative. Jervais bani Tremere also called in a boon owed to him by the Sword-Bearer and gained a seat to speak for the Warlocks, although Jürgen took him in grudgingly at best. Over the following years, Jürgen has growing more accepting of the Usurpers and even allowed them to establish a chantry in the city.

Two problems trouble the Prince of Magdeburg's mind these nights. The first is Alexander, revered Ventrue elder and exiled Prince of Paris, who has sought refuge in his city. While the much older Patriarchian makes a public show of deferring to Jürgen in all things and recognizing his power of office, his motives are quite unclear.

Jürgen's other worry of late is a spy in the city. Although he has not yet discovered who exactly is feeding information to his sire, information he considers sensitive, if not actually damning, he suspects Low Clan treachery.

Actually, he's right, up to a point. Jürgen's long-time prisoner, the Caitiff Albin the Ghost escapes the city in 1230. He reenters Magdeburg later that year and acts as a spy for Hardestadt who feels that his once trusted childe has become too independent and may be keeping secrets. Albin, however, has other interests as well — interests that may either grant him his freedom or cost him his existence (see page 74).

THE MYTH OF THE SLEEPING EMPEROR

Every land has its legend, every people its once-great king slumbering beneath a hill. Legends evolve about him waking up in a time of dire threats and pain, leading his people to war, emerging victorious, ruling his people again and leading it back to its former glory. Many great names are related with such hopes, including Arthur, Brian Boru, Knez Lazar, Charlemagne and even the Christian Messiah. For the Holy Roman Empire, the sleeping emperor is Frederick Barbarossa.

It is said that he rests in the Kyffhäuser, a small mountainous region in the eastern part of the empire, sleeping until the empire needs his guiding hand again. Only 50 years have passed since the great emperor was fatally wounded during the Third Crusade after a great victory at Ikonion. The emperor drowned while crossing a river in the Calycadnus region close to the city today called Saleph. His corpse was never found, and in 1230, he is an immortal legend.

Some people believed his grandson, Frederick II, to be the returned Barbarossa. Others whisper about having seen Barbarossa at night, though, far

away from his grandson's residence in Sicily. They say he seems older and wiser than the emperor on the throne. They claim he is surrounded by an aura of power and serenity he never had while he was alive. But these reports are dismissed as myths born from the minds of men and women who crave the great emperor's return. And as those who knew him in life grow old and die, the reports claiming he walked among his people at night fade as well. What remains is the legend that he rests beneath the Kyffhäuser waiting for a time of need to rise again. But that time hasn't come yet.

Rumors spread among the undead of the Holy Roman Empire after Barbarossa's strange death, too. The fact alone that no corpse was ever found led many to believe that he had been taken into the ranks of the Cainites. Rumor among the Ventrue has it that both Hardestadt and Julia Antasia had vied for influence on the emperor and that the Roman Methuselah had been more successful in her efforts. But even the Antasians have neither seen him after his death nor have they found proof that he has actually been Embraced.

Frankfurt

The "Franks' ford" is not among the oldest towns of the Holy Roman Empire, but after its first mention in AD 794, the city grew steadily in size and importance. According to local myth, the place got its name when Charlemagne and his Franks had to flee from the Saxons during the war and reached a river. There, a white doe and its young appeared. The animals crossed the water and the Franks followed them through the ford and thus reached the safety of the other riverbank.

Charlemagne, King of the Franks, called an imperial gathering, the so-called "Frankfurt Synod," in 794. The town was relatively small then, but already famous for its market. The Franconian court that had been erected on the so-called Dome Hill housed the Franconian high nobility for half a year. In the following centuries, the city outgrew the Dome Hill. The court became a palatinate, the residence of the east Franconian Carolingians. In 950, Julia Antasia reached Frankfurt. Now, 280 years later, the city is still a bustling center of trade and commerce. Julia Antasia is the unquestioned Prince of Frankfurt, and true to her liberal ideals, she counters the Patriarchs' conservative style with a certain amount of cosmopolitan open-mindedness.

In 1152, the German lords elected Frederick I as king in Frankfurt. From that time on, every German king

was elected in Frankfurt. The Frankfurt Fair dealing with grains, wood, wool, wax, wine and cattle was established in the 12th century, and it added to the prestige of the city. The erection of the city's wall, the *Staufenermauer*, fortified the city, and the Teutonic Knights founded a house of the order in Sachsenhausen, a city on the south bank of the Main across from Frankfurt. The fencing masters of Frankfurt had the right to pass their title on to others during the Frankfurt Fair and make them members of the Brotherhood of Saint Marx, a brotherhood of fencing champions. This was a special privilege accorded to Frankfurt's citizens by the Roman kings, making Frankfurt the only place in the Holy Roman Empire where someone was able to become a recognized fencing master.

At the beginning of the 13th century, Frankfurt was an important merchant and artisan town surrounded by lush meadows and grain-fields. In 1219, the year of the imperial gathering at Frankfurt where toll, minting and justice reforms were established, Frederick II gave the community a site to erect a chapel. This house of worship, later called Saint Leonhard, was under immediate protection of the empire. The emperor granted the citizens the right to name the priest for this new church. Frankfurt changed from a palatinate under the rule of a lieutenant of the king to a city ruled by a *Schultheiß* (city governor) in the name of the emperor. Citizens of Frankfurt took



over management and jurisdiction jobs, which had been handled by court officials thus far. A senate now ruled the city and its roughly 10,000 inhabitants, much to Julia Antasia's delight.

Cologne

In 19 BC, the Roman general Agrippa, friend and son-in-law of Emperor Augustus, ruled as the emperor's governor in the Gaulish provinces. He founded a settlement for the Germanic tribe called Ubians he relocated from the right to the left bank of the Rhine. The center of this settlement, the *oppidum Ubiorum*, was a well-known place of worship in the Empire, called *Ara Ubiorum*. Shortly thereafter, Agrippa returned to Rome to be Embraced by Julia Antasia.

Agrippa's mortal granddaughter Agrippina was born in the year AD 15 in the Ubian settlement and married Emperor Claudius later. Her grandfather gently influenced her from behind the scenes, and in the year AD 50, she had her husband grant city rights and a new name to her place of birth. This name consisted of a short history of the city: *Colonia Claudia Ara Agrippinensium*, "the city that was founded under Claudius' reign at the place of worship according to Agrippina's wishes." Veterans, retired soldiers of the legions garrisoned at the Rhine and their families, artisans and merchants settled in the new *colonia*.

In the 20 years after its founding, the *colonia* was surrounded by a city wall more than two miles in length

with nine gates and 21 towers, a move partially instigated by Agrippa who also settled in the city in AD 60.

In AD 90, the Roman military sectors on the Rhine became provinces through an administrative reform. Cologne was now the capital of lower Germany, the governor resided in the city's *praetorium* (mayor's office). Agrippa still claimed Cologne as his domain, and he usually exerted subtle influence on the mayor if he felt it necessary.

In 310, Emperor Constantine had the Castle of Deutz erected on the bank of the Rhine to protect the borders. It was connected to the city by a permanent bridge. Later, in 401, the Roman legions were called back from the border at the Rhine, and Cologne was ruled by the Franks. Agrippa moved south along the river and left the area free from Cainite influence for quite a while. A group of Christian mages settled in the city and remained for over 400 years. In 860, a coterie of Cainites led by the Ventrue Giseller, a childe of Agrippa, tried to re-conquer Cologne by burning down the Dome using mortal minions and thus killing or driving off the spellcasters. The conflagration struck a mighty blow against the Christian mages (although it did not drive them off completely), and Giseller was able to settle in Cologne with his retinue. He declared himself prince of the city.

In 1230, Prince Giseller still rules the Cainites of the city on the Rhine. The open-minded Patrician has made the ancient city a bustling center of commerce

that serves as a meeting point for Cainites from all over Europe. In close cooperation with virtually all other clans except for the Lasombra (whom he hates for an earlier attempt to usurp his power) he has created a very supportive climate for the Cainites' intrigues. Giselher rules with a calm hand, for he has powerful allies. He has protected and supported the Nosferatu throughout his reign, and little escapes their notice (and therefore that of the prince).

Giselher is a deeply respected, almost admired Prince. His principles are based on the tenets his grand-sire, Julia Antasia, taught him, and so Cologne becomes increasingly important as a secondary center of the Antasians which like Frankfurt, draws its appeal both from its worldly wealth and its open-minded ruler.

Beyond the Patricians' Reach

As much as they might claim otherwise, the Ventrue's grip on Germany and the Holy Roman Empire is not undisputed. Prague, nominally the domain of Josef Zvi, is actually the haven of a much older and more ambitious Cainite. Hamburg and Vienna both fall outside of the influence of both factions of the Ventrue. The lands east of the Elbe are not Patrician domain, as much as this chafes Lord Jürgen.

Prague - The Golden City

In the last nights before the turn of the century, Rudolf Brandl, vassal of Mithras and German Ventrue Prince of the Golden City, approached Josef Zvi. Zvi was the leader of the domain's Nosferatu and defender of the ghetto and the old town. Brandl was annoyed with Zvi's isolationist policy, so he demanded that the Nosferatu leader open up the ghetto's gates so that the prince's retinue could hunt there. Josef Zvi, for his part, hated the good-looking, vainglorious Patrician. He turned him down, and the prince flew into a rage. He repeated his demand in 1199, this time in the form of an official order to a lesser. When the ghetto's gates remained closed, Brandl decided to teach the insolent Leper a final lesson. He sent several specially trained, heavily armed ghouls to drag Josef Zvi from his hole and destroy him, thus making an example that was meant to discourage all other potential dissidents. When the prince's ghouls reached Josef Zvi's haven in the ghetto shortly before nightfall, they found it deserted. When they returned to Prince Brandl's private chambers to report their failure, they only found a pile of ashes lying in his canopied bed. Josef Zvi had discovered Brandl's plans, and while the ghouls had searched and laid waste

to his haven, he had used the secret passageways of Prague known only to his clan, made his way into the arrogant Ventrue's private chambers and slew him.

Josef Zvi was lucky. Although Mithras was enraged when he found out about Brandl's destruction, other, more pressing matters kept him from intervening directly in Transylvania. So, after destroying Rudolf Brandl, Josef Zvi started searching for people who would support his claims for power. He renewed the alliance with the Premysls, a mortal noble family who had ruled the city for generations. Little did Zvi know that by siding with the decadent aristocrats, he had attracted the interest of a far greater evil that had slumbered under the Golden City of Prague for ages: that of Shaagra, the Tzimisce Methuselah.

In her mortal days, Shaagra was worshipped as a fertility goddess by a small Slavic tribe called the Vroi. Shortly after she had passed on the leadership to her favorite granddaughter, a woman called Libussa, she was Embraced by an ancient Fiend in whose domain her tribe had made camp. Shaagra then made Libussa her ghoul in order that she would be able to provide strong leadership to the Vroi forever. Not long after her tribe had permanently settled in the region where Prague would one day be located, Shaagra sank into torpor. Her mind remained active, though, and she kept pursuing her agendas through some chosen mortal members of the Premysl family. But in the late 12th century, the Methuselah slowly started to wake, and her hunger was extreme. Even in her half-torpid state, she realized that only Cainite vitae was sufficient to slake her thirst, and her mind reached out to the lands above her slumbering form.

When vampires began disappearing in Prague in the first decade of Josef Zvi's rule, especially visiting Tremere, the Warlocks represented by Ardan of Golden Lane insisted on a full investigation of the problem. The new Prince of Prague set upon this task with great fervor to stop the threat to the city's Cainite population for fear of losing the vast privileges the Lepers had never before enjoyed. Soon, some of the younger members of the Nosferatu found clear evidence that pointed to a certain ruined castle outside the city.

When Josef Zvi went to the forlorn castle one night to discover what had caused him so much trouble, he realized too late that his clanmates' investigations had not been clandestine enough. The ancient Fiend, who had just finished exsanguinating an emissary from Vienna, awaited him, covered in Tremere blood, very much awake, active and decided to once again play a decisive part in the political fate of Bohemia. She bullied the terrified Nosferatu Prince — Zvi was shrewd, but by no means able to stand up to a Methuselah — into becoming her pawn. Although Shaagra was a relic from

a time long past, she was clever enough to realize that she needed someone to guide her through her first years in this strange new age.

Josef Zvi saw clearly that the Methuselah would soon deny him his own, personal agendas. He desperately searched for a way to avoid becoming a slave — being a helpless pawn was bad enough. His chance came in 1211 when Zelios, the roaming Nosferatu architect, paid him a visit in the Hradschin. Choosing the lesser of two evils, Josef Zvi confided in his clanmate and accepted a blood oath to him voluntarily, believing that the soft-spoken, revered builder of castles would never exploit it.

In the meantime, Shaagra had decided on a political course of action. She had reviewed the efforts of the various Tzimisce in all of Transylvania, starting with her own childer and their descendants whom she regarded as her natural choice in allies. The ancient Fiend found Vladimir Rustovich, the *Voivode of Voivodes* and her own grandchilde, very much to her liking. At that time, Rustovich faced attacks by the Order of Teutonic Knights that King Andreas II of Hungary had called upon to rid his holdings from the pagan Cumans. They fulfilled this quest but tried to create a state within the state while they were in Eastern Europe. When Shaagra recognized the Patricians' hand behind these German pretenders, she decided to back Rustovich, and her help became invaluable when she aided him in repelling Lord Jürgen of Magdeburg and his army. She gained an important ally in Myca Vykos, a Fiend from Constantinople who could tell her about the great city's fall. Additionally, he already stood in open opposition to Jürgen. The Transylvanian mountains reverberated with both Fiends' laughter when the beaten Teutonic Knights, among them a decent number of Cainite Knights of the Black Cross, beat a hasty retreat and barely escaped with their unlives.

But Shaagra is far from satisfied. Her ultimate goal is to dominate the Cainites of the Holy Roman Empire. If the despised Ventrue can push east, why should she who exceeds this puny Hardestadt and rivals even Mithras in power not try and extend her territories west? Her core problem is that she has yet to notice the fundamental changes in the Cainite political style in Europe since the time of her torpor — and those she has noticed she considers trivial. The ancient Fiend's arrogance might prove a fatal error in the end when the Mongol hordes arrive.

Bulbous Death

When Shaagra finally felt she had learned enough about the rules and customs of this new age and the history between her torpor and reawakening, she decided to force a blood oath upon Josef Zvi. But Josef Zvi was



more aware of his own minion status and of the fate that eventually awaited him than Shaagra knew. The Prince of Prague managed to dodge her move to make him her slave and still make Shaagra believe she had turned him into a puppet. The only one who knows about his ruse is the Nosferatu architect Zelios, and he will not betray Josef for fear of Shaagra's revenge. Still, Josef's options are somewhat limited by the fact that any open opposition against Shaagra and her insane dreams of conquest would make the Methuselah aware that she's been tricked.

So, Josef Zvi relies on the things his clan traditionally excels at: stealth and secrecy. In his frantic search for a way out of his dilemma, Josef stumbles upon a myth of his clan. An ancient Nosferatu who has shaped European affairs in the past is supposed to lie in torpor under the city of Frankfurt. He is called Angiwar, the Dragon, and he is said to be a former Germanic warrior. Josef Zvi is sure that Angiwar would not want Shaagra to invade the territory he claims as his domain, so the Prince of Prague hopes to enlist Angiwar's help in subtle efforts of resistance against his "mistress." Perhaps in the end, he can manipulate the two ancient ones to destroy each other or at least persuade Angiwar to deal with his nemesis Shaagra, making him, Zvi, Prince of Prague in fact as well as name.

In hopes of reaching this ultimate goal, Josef Zvi sends messengers to look for Angiwar all over Europe. Instead of finding the help Zvi so desperately looks for, though, the messengers disappear... but not before spreading the seed of disease. Shaagra doesn't know any details about those minor Cainites her "puppet" Zvi sends on insignificant errands (and frankly, she doesn't care), but she sees them as a welcome tool to weaken possible obstacles in her way to conquer the lands in the west. She therefore infects the young Cainites that leave her sphere of influence for unknown destinations by feeding them tainted blood. The blood that Josef's messengers ingest before journeying west carries a foul derivative of leprosy that Shaagra has designed in a kind of alchemical warfare. It does not affect its undead carriers at all, but humans they feed upon become infected with what mortals of the time dubbed "the Bulbous Death." One of those plague-bearers was, in fact, the cause for the disease that stopped Emperor Frederick II's first attempt for a Fifth Crusade.

The trip to the northwest is a long and hazardous one, and Angiwar's followers kill those few uninvited siblings who finally make it to the Dragon's domain to stop them from spreading disease among the elder's herd. So, Zvi's plans are countered without him even noticing, and the chances that he'll find out any time soon are slim, for none of his messengers return to tell the tale. If, however, a traveling coterie of undead not

associated with Prague or Zvi went west to investigate the messengers' fate for him, they might escape Shaagra's attention. If this group manages to pass on Josef's information to Angiwar or some of his followers and gain their interest, nights in Prague might change somewhat.


Vienna: Bastion of the Usurpers

In 1230, a vampire who says "Vienna" thinks "Tremere," but Vienna and its surroundings have not been in the center of Cainite interest for very long. In the face of the thaumaturgists' immense presence in the metropolis at the Danube, it is all too easily forgotten that Cainite history in Vienna did not start with Lotharius preparing the move to Austria. Vienna's history before 1230 is shaped by two very different kinds of rulers: the Romans and the Babenberger family. Strictly speaking, the era defining Vienna's past started only with the Roman presence in the area and the influence of the Roman Ventrue Valerianus that had almost ended in his destruction.

The Romans: The Beginning of Civilization

Around AD 50, the Romans fortified the military camp of Vindobona in the province of Noricum. Under Valerianus's tutelage, a tent city with almost 20,000 inhabitants arose around the military camp. Valerianus Embraced childer from both the pagan natives and the Romans and established his line thus as the dominant Cainites of the city.

In AD 166, the Tzimisce Jorska manipulated a barbarian tribe called Markomans into attacking the Roman camp. Valerianus intended to relocate the Germanic tribe into Bohemia, and Jorska had no need for even more uncivilized warriors flooding his homeland which bordered on the Roman territories to the east. The Romans fought back the attack and conquered the Markomans — no doubt their generals had subtle strategic aid from the experienced Roman leader. After that, the Roman fort began to gain more than just military importance. In the 1,000 years before, only a few Illyrian and Celtic settlers had stopped by the riverbanks of the Danube and the Wien river to eke out a meager living. The Romans now erected stone houses with floor heating, water pipes and toilets, created paved streets and monumental walls. In 213, Vindobona finally obtained city rights when Valerianus pressed for it and used his contacts in the Eternal City to polish his domain's status.



Doing so, however, required him to leave the city and return to Rome for a time. He left his childer behind and in charge. He planned to return in glory, at which point he intended to declare himself *pater patriae*, father of the fatherland, in the old Roman style and establish a Cainite senate to help him rule. To this end, he had cast his lot with a family of Austrian nobility, the Babenbergs, and worked on long-time strategies to get them to power.

But other Cainites had set their sites on Valerianus's city. A group of Nosferatu, led by a mysterious figure calling himself the Pawnbroker, murdered the Roman Ventrue's childer and seized power in his absence, and they were not about to give it up when he returned. Valerianus cast about for allies, and he found the recently Embraced Tremere Etrius. As Etrius had used his sorcerous might to protect Vienna in the past, Valerianus guessed that he would help drive the Pawnbroker from the city. The Ventrue promised the Tremere protection from their foes if they would side with him against the Pawnbroker and his ilk. Using the conquest of Vienna under the Hungarian king Matthias I Corvinus as a cover, some Tremere managed to slip into Vienna aided by Valerianus without the Nosferatu noticing. Calling on the resources of both undead soldiers and mortal magi, Gargoyles and magical constructs attacked the Lepers by night while ghouls in service to the Ventrue hunted them by day. After less than two months, the ancient Ventrue's claim for domain was undisputed.

Etrius was satisfied to Embrace the mortal mages of the Vienna chantry, which he himself had built in AD 920, slowly and carefully, a task that would not be completed until 1185, after the diablerie of Saulot and the Tremere's rise to power as a clan.

Valerianus himself died under the fangs of Tzimisce for his role in aiding the Usurpers at a time when they could have been crushed. The Vienna chantry suffered some losses, but the Tremere there fought back as best they could and weathered the storm. In 1155, Etrius called in old favors and installed Lotharius, as prince in the Ventrue Methuselah's stead, although Filaereus, another of his childer, leads the chantry. One day soon, when the city is safe in the hands of his house and clan, Etrius will relocate the clan's most important chantry to what is today called the first district and have the immense material and intellectual treasures of the Tremere brought to the city from Hungary. In preparation, Lotharius has supported and covertly funded a movement among the mortal populace to have the medieval city wall that completely surrounds the Inner City expanded and renewed. Immediately beyond these walls are farming and fishing villages that supply the majority of the food for Vienna's human inhabitants and serve as hunting grounds for any Cainite who does not want to be too close to the center of the Usurpers' power.

The Magus Prince has started to turn Vienna into the city—or fortress—of his clan. Even now, chambers are carved into the very earth beneath the city. Etrius and Lotharius form the city to the clan's image. As of yet, however, Etrius's plans for Vienna's unique political concept on the Cainite level—a domain ruled by a clan rather than a prince and nominally headed by a council whose members are puppets of the Tremere—are still in a very preliminary stage. In more than one respect, the city lies at a crossroads. It is located at the intersection between the Alps and the Pannonian valley, and it is the border between east and west for mortals and Cainites alike. Vienna has a large Jewish population that is allowed to settle down, buy land and trade, which is exceptional for the Dark Medieval. The harbor situated where the Amber Road from the North crosses the Danube adds to the city's wealth. The whole Inner City is in an architectural frenzy, new buildings seem to spring up daily. Vienna in 1230 truly is an industrious city and the Usurpers are in the middle.

Hamburg: Free City of the Hanseatic League

The City on the Elbe is a huge port and one of the most important centers of commerce in the Holy Roman Empire. It is also the center of the Hanseatic League, a community of merchants from Northern Germany. A very peculiar Cainite calls himself prince of the city, but he actually wields almost no real power within the city.

Early History

Early in the ninth century, the Franks under Charlemagne vanquished the Saxons and reached the Elbe. They erected a walled fortress close to the old Saxon village of Hamm (the name is derived from the old German word *ham*, meaning “marshland”).

In the 10th century, Archbishop Adaldag was able to reestablish the Hamburg See, the original having been destroyed by a Viking raid in AD 845. He expanded the castle and the settlement alike and provided the town with market rights. In the meantime, many artisans and merchants had settled there. With them came Midian, a Malkavian of unknown origins who found the small town empty of Cainites.

By 950, Hamburg had approximately 500 inhabitants. In 966, the German king and Saxon Duke I established the Saxon Hermann Billung as ruler of the ever-growing settlement. He was backed by the Roman Brujah Lucius Cornelius Scipio and his companion and erstwhile lover, the Greek Cappadocian Penelope who came to the city fleeing Cainite upheaval in Ravenna

(see Chapter Five). They sought to establish a peaceful coexistence with Hamburg's mortals while helping them advance culturally, scientifically and economically. Still, Hermann Billung and his Brujah patron could not prevent the second destruction of the prospering Hanseatic settlement by the Germanic Obotrite tribe in 983.

The 11th century was a time of open rivalry between Midian, who had begun to cultivate influence in the Church, and Lucius who backed the more secular powers. In 1045, Bernhard II from the Billung family had a tower fortress built beyond the castle walls, the so-called Alster Castle, to prevent the archbishops from having the most glorious building in town. His son Ordulf erected the New Castle with its extensive basement levels (of which the Brujah happily took advantage).

By 1050, Hamburg had about 900 inhabitants, half of whom were clerics — an unusual state of affairs, and one that demonstrated Midian's power. The Malkavian declared himself prince in 1054. At the same time, Hamburg's merchants took up mercantile relationships to the north and the east, reaching Iceland, Greenland and Finland. After Hamburg had again been conquered and destroyed by the Obotrites twice in 1066 and 1072, the Church's power dwindled, and the archbishopric moved to Bremen. Midian stayed behind and sunk into a state of somber, bitter despair.

Recent Events

When the Billung line died out in 1106, the Saxonian Duke Lothar gave Holstein, Wagria and Stormarn (including Hamburg) as fiefdoms to Adolf II of Schauenburg. He and his heirs ruled benevolently — again with the aid of the pair of Prometheans who had been quick to establish their power behind the new ruling family. While Midian nominally was prince of the city, Lucius and Penelope chartered its course. Hamburg blossomed like never before. The marshlands south of the city and even some of the closest islands were surrounded by dams and added to the city grounds. In early 1189, a new political alliance began to bud: The Antasian Ventrue contacted the Brujah, and preliminary talks showed that their mutual ideas, philosophies and concepts were quite compatible. Emperor Frederick Barbarossa granted the city of Hamburg freedom from tolls for commerce and ship trade on the Elbe, among other privileges. Meanwhile, the 1,500 inhabitants elected an aristocratic council in 1190 and erected two town halls in 1200.

This was the time Midian's atrocities began. His mind had completely shattered by the utter failure of his efforts to rule Hamburg through clerical means. His first reaction was to demand that the Prometheans stop acting as benefactors of the Hanseatic merchants, bow down to him, swear fealty and "show him the respect he was due." When Lucius simply refused, the Madman

retreated to his haven to brood, but he did not approach the Brujah again.

It was only when letters arrived from various princes asking for the fate of messengers they had sent to the city that Lucius and Penelope discovered the hideous truth. Midian had received many diplomats from different courts of the Holy Roman Empire and diablerized them. Incorporating their souls into the hive of his fractured mind, he created the court he never had. Now, Midian sits alone in the vast reception hall of his gray stone tower, brooding and holding elaborate conversations with a host of courtiers who exist only in his imagination — or perhaps they still pulse in his blood.

Lucius was deeply shocked by this discovery, while Penelope (a follower of the Road of Bones) was fascinated by Midian's actions. Used to studying death in all of its forms with a cold detachment, she began watching the mad "prince" from a distance and sometimes even distracted investigators who got too close to discovering his guilty secrets by laying false trails — a course of action which she has not shared with Lucius. She knows that her former lover, a Prodigal, would not approve, but deems it necessary to protect him. Fortunately, Midian's court seems to be complete, so Cainites who wish to pay homage to the Prince of Hamburg can do so without risking a cruel death at his fangs. Any visitor who hears Midian's whispers to his invisible court assumes no worse than that the prince is mad, which is true, of course. So far, only one visitor guessed at the truth and tried to report home. That unfortunate emissary, a French Toreador, had looked too deeply into Midian's mind, but he was efficiently dispatched by Penelope before he could send word of his findings.

Both Lucius and Penelope keep silent about their discovery. Not even the perpetrator himself knows that someone is in on his repulsive secret. If word about his outrages were to leak out, Midian would meet Final Death more swiftly than the Prometheans could react, for all of the Cainite courts affected by his atrocities would rush to bring him to justice. But Midian can play an important role for the ancient Roman Brujah. Lucius has no intention to declare himself prince because his interests in Hamburg and beyond lie elsewhere. He wants to grant continued support to the Hanseatic League and use it to spread his Promethean ideas throughout Europe. So he stays behind the scenes and keeps the Madman in "power" to use him as a scapegoat should a really serious problem ever arise in Hamburg. Conveniently "discovering" a mad diablerist in their midst and leaving him the blame for whatever has upset the domain would leave Lucius's power untouched. This strategy, while tactically and politically sound, is morally reprehensible to Lucius, and it eats away at him nightly. He knows that he may soon have to either expose Midian for what he is or make some drastic change in his road, and Penelope isn't sure that either of those options is acceptable.

Meanwhile, the relations between the Antasians and the Hanseatic Prometheans continue to improve. On several occasions, Lucius and Penelope have proven themselves as staunch allies against Hardestadt's Patriarchs, especially since Magdeburg and its ambitious ruler, Jürgen, are not too far away.

Life and Unlife in Hamburg

The Hamburg citizens are proud people living in a wealthy city dedicated to commerce. It is in these years that Hamburg earns the moniker "the gate to the world"; there are not many other places in the Holy Roman Empire where one can find such a diversity of goods and of people from all over the world. In their pride, the Hanseatic merchants demand an exceptional status for themselves and their bustling trade port. Hamburg is more a part of the Hanseatic League in its function as a trade empire than being part of the Holy Roman Empire. It keeps its riches within the city and the League, and the empire doesn't profit much from it. The economic standard is far higher than elsewhere in the empire, and the rich, self-confident merchants will continue shaping their own destiny.

Hamburg's Cainites (except for Midian, of course) are a tightly knit bunch. The city's few Cainites staunchly support the Hanseatic League and present a united front against the German Ventrue's claims for domain in the

empire. Since the city is so important for traders, however, Lucius is hard pressed to know who's in the city at any given time since Midian doesn't bother trying.

Sicily: The Isle under the Shadow

In the mortal world, Sicily is the southernmost part of the Holy Roman Empire. The Papal State and the various small Italian city-states (see Chapter Five) separate it from the main part of the empire. In the Cainite realm, this island off the south coast of Italy is the bastion of the Lasombra. Just as the Venture have a near stranglehold on Cainite affairs in Germany, the Magisters are easily the most powerful clan in Sicily. Also like Germany, the isle under the shadow sees internal power struggles within the clan. Here, where the *Castel d'Ombro* close to Siracusa marks the heart of the Magisters, rivalries are just a little more brutal than usual.

In 1230, two major factions of Lasombra fight for dominance on the island. The Muslim Ashirra are continually losing ground in Iberia, which only strengthens their commitment to keep and expand what power they have in Sicily. The Christian Lasombra who have followed the Crusades and who fight a bitter war of resistance against the smothering Ventrue dominance in the Holy Roman Empire likewise cannot afford to lose any leverage on the island that is the main seat of their clan.



With all their bickering and infighting, the Magisters were not ready for the simple twist of fate that brought them direct access to the single most important mortal in the Holy Roman Empire. Caught up in fond memories of his childhood days, Emperor Frederick II chose to relocate his residence from cold Germany to the lovely island in the Mediterranean Sea. In theory, this would have been the ideal time for all Magister factions present in Sicily to start weaving intricate nets of influence. But having the emperor suddenly in their midst, the Lasombra (usually masters of stealth and clandestine manipulations), seemed unable to act effectively. While the leaders of the various factions struggled to make a decision, a young Latin Lasombra decided to act. Angered by the slow, tedious way his elders went about the problem at hand, he started to edge closer to Frederick, intending to bind the emperor and use him as leverage for a brilliant career within the clan. In this instance, the *Amici Noctis* (see page 86) did not hesitate. Before the young Cainite could even get close to the emperor, he was attacked and destroyed. Even his name is considered anathema, and it is never spoken among the Magisters.

The Muslim faction — or *Qabilat al-Khayal* — led by the Nubian sage and storyteller Ngalo Umbeke has had the greatest success in gaining influence with the emperor so far. Frederick has always been fond of Arab culture, and he especially admires the sophistication of the Arab scientists and philosophers. Surrounding himself with Arab counselors, some of whom are extremely influential in his day-to-day decisions, has brought him under the tutelage of two learned men who stay in Sicily specifically to gain influence with the emperor for their faction. These two are bitter rivals of Boukephos, one of Lasombra's childer, who has always been a consummate wanderer, but who comes to Sicily often to act as leader of the Latin faction. Ngalo Umbeke sometimes even confers with the emperor personally in late-night meetings, because Frederick is simply fascinated by the towering man with the night-black skin who has the looks of a warrior prince from the desert, but the gentle manners and quiet competence of a true sage. The two men take long nocturnal walks on Sicily's beaches, discussing philosophy and new ideas. Of course, an important man like Frederick is never without his personal guard, elite fighters who would not hesitate to give their lives to save his. Additionally, both factions of Lasombra watch these nightly meetings closely. This is why Ngalo has never even attempted a direct move to gain more direct influence over the emperor. Getting a chance to plant ideas in the emperor's ear is more than enough for the Nubian.

These consultations might soon come to an end, though. Montano, the childer of Lasombra himself and de facto prince of the island, has never showed any al-

legiance to one of the two religiously motivated factions. He has made specifically clear, though, that he is less than happy about the connection between Ngalo and the emperor for his own reasons, and his minions are even now moving to neutralize it.

Another key player in the race for the emperor's soul and mind is Su'uan. The Setite was born in Rome under the rule of Nero and has since become a high priestess of Set. Her sire Nefer-Kiti saw Frederick II in a vision and believes him to carry her dark god's special favor as he is red-haired. She sent her beautiful childer to Sicily to win him over for the Serpents, approaching him in the guise of an exotic, enigmatic mortal woman and trying to seduce him. Frederick II is newly married to his second wife whom he seems to love dearly, though, so he has paid no mind to her advances thus far. And even if he were to succumb to Su'uan, it is improbable that she would be able to exert any real influence without any of the other factions interested in the emperor neutralizing her

THE CASTLE OF SHADOW

The *Castel d'Ombro*, as the local peasantry refers to it, is the castle in which Lasombra himself resides. A Moorish architect erected it on the foundations of an old Roman castle centuries ago, designing the building after Lasombra's personal wishes. It is close to the city of Siracusa, and by all accounts, it is impregnable. To keep its secrets, Lasombra personally killed the architect after the castle was completed and imprisoned his soul in a black gem.

The clan founder spends most of his nights in deep slumber. The many servants and slaves within the castle never speak because waking the master from his fitful slumber inadvertently would mean certain death. Whenever he is awake, though, he spends his time with his oldest childer, Montano. Montano assumes the mantle of leadership among Sicily's Cainites because the second eldest of Lasombra's childer, Boukephos, roams the world and his youngest childer, Gratiano, still undergoes tutelage as he is merely 130 years out of his Embrace.

The Antediluvian does leave the castle occasionally, when his wanderlust becomes an uncontrollable urge. On these rare occasions, the Antediluvian roams the world in disguise for months, years or even decades. As long as he is away, the blackened bronze gates that form the main entrance to Lasombra's fortress remain open night and day so that the master of the building will feel welcome whenever he returns home. In the end, then, it's up to any visitor in Sicily to decide whether the open gates are a good omen or a dire portent.

efforts. Probably one or the other Magister faction would long ago have dealt with her if not for Ngalo Umbeke. Su'uan has known the Nubian since the time when both of them were slaves in the days of the Roman Empire. Their paths have crossed time and again ever since, and some time in the third century, she stayed with him in Ravenna for over a year and tricked him into a blood oath. Now, he shelters and hides the Serpent and uses all his considerable influence to keep the other Magisters from finding her.

The Muslim Lasombra's chances for success in the race for the emperor are much better since they are in a prime position. What they have achieved, however, is only the chance to put the emperor under their tutelage (which may be enough). The Muslims are by no means the only Lasombra who have managed to establish agents at his court, though. Maybe this even contributes to his relative freedom of decision, because many of the different factions' actions cancel each other out. The Ashirra won at least a partial victory when he chose Frankfurt rather than Sicily for his coronation. The Muslim faction did not want the coronation to take place in Sicily because too many devout Christians would have shown up suddenly. As the Lasombra have problems enough with pious people snooping around on their island since the Teutonic Knights have established a chapter house in Sicily a few years ago, Ngalo Umbeke advised the emperor to have himself crowned in Frankfurt, the where his famous grandfather was crowned. Frederick took this advice and decided to use the traditional coronation place instead of "his" island.

Important Factions and Organizations

During the War of Princes, alliances and enmity spring up virtually overnight, and secret factions disappear with the changing phases of the moon. Some such factions are the result of vampiric meddling in mortal groups, while some are purely Cainite affairs. Two such factions — the Teutonic Knights and the Silent Fury — are described here. What the future holds for the vampires of these factions is anyone's guess.

The Teutonic Knights : Swords of the Faith

In AD 1190, Frederick of Swabia founded the Teutonic Order amidst the Third Crusade. Its origins lay in a German field hospital close to Acre. When Frederick reached Acre, he took control of the hospital and obtained permission from his brother, Emperor

Henry IV, to found a new Christian order there. In 1191, the order moved into a house in Acre, supplied to it by Guy de Lusignan, the exiled King of Jerusalem.

Like the two other important Christian knights' orders, the Hospitalers of Saint John and the Knights Templar, the Teutonic Order started in Palestine. Its primary goal was identical to those of the Crusades: to expand and restore the Christian Faith. The knights' day-to-day business was to care for the ill, the wounded and the maimed and to help crusaders and pilgrims on the way to the Holy Land. Its rising importance also garnered the attention of several powerful Cainites, among them Jürgen of Magdeburg, who was in the Holy Land as part of the Third Crusade at the time. The Sword-Bearer was well aware of the potential of the existing knightly orders. Unlike other more established orders, the Teutonic Knights were largely free of vampiric influence, which allowed Jürgen to use them.

In 1193, Heinrich Walpot of Passenheim, who had come to Palestine with the knights' army, became prior of the order. The former Knight of the Hospitalers of Saint John seemed to be the right man to change the Hospitaller order to a military one because he was experienced in leading such an order. In 1198, Pope Innocent III recognized the Teutonic Knights, making them a military order. The order consisted of knights, lay brothers and clerical brothers. Its general rules were styled after those of the Hospitalers of Saint John. For the knights themselves, though, the Templars' rules applied. All members vowed to live in "poverty, chastity and obedience."

In the beginnings of the Teutonic Order, the Kingdom of Jerusalem was divided into different sectors, and the order established a house in each of them. Since these houses served as defenses, they were all built as castles. At the head of each castle stood either the *Komtur* (commander) who ran it with the aid of the *Kommandantur* (commanding body) consisting of 12 knights.

The order erected its first chapter house in Acre, only a few weeks after the crusaders' army had conquered the city in 1191. By 1196, five more houses were established in the Holy Land, located in Gaza, Jaffa, Ascalon, Rama and Zamsi. In 1197, the knights established a house in the important crusader ports in Southern Italy and on Sicily, Barletta and Palermo. The order was able to obtain large holdings north of Acre in 1222, and the knights built a huge, well-fortified castle there within two years. When this fortress — called Montfort, the "strong mountain" — was finished in 1224, the Teutonic Knights relocated their mother house from Jerusalem to Acre, and the *Hochmeister* (grand master) moved there.

The Rise of the Teutonic Order

The Teutonic Order saw an era of continued growth and expansion in the 13th century, and it soon rivaled the Templars and Hospitalers. It founded 300 *Kommenden*, as the houses of the order were now called, in the Holy Land and in Europe in less than 100 years — from the river Dūna in northern Europe to Palestine in the south and the Atlantic Ocean in the west.

It soon became clear that a good organization at home was as important as in the Holy Land to meet all demands and secure a steady supply from the Holy Roman Empire. To lead and control the home front, the order established a new *Großkomtur* (high commander). With the aid of *Komturen* (commanders) who led the *Balleien* (districts of the empire), the *Großkomtur* controlled the order's fate within the Holy Roman Empire. In 1209, Hermann von Salza became *Hochmeister* of the Teutonic Order, and the knights' rise in power, status and fame truly began. Under its new *Hochmeister*, the order was highly regarded by the emperor and almost all nobles of the empire, but also by the pope and the clerical lords. Frederick II and Pope Gregory IX both trust von Salza implicitly. He is not only *Hochmeister* of the Teutonic Order, but also one of the leading diplomats of his time.

King Andreas II of Hungary, participant of the Fifth Crusade in 1217, had heard of the young order and its capable *Hochmeister* and asked it to fight for him at the border to Transylvania. He allowed the knights to keep the lands they "freed" from pagan taint and stayed there until 1225. When the pressure of the Prussian marauders attacking his duchy forced Duke Konrad of Masovia to ask the Teutonic Order for help, Emperor Frederick II and Pope Honorius III both decided to grant him this help. As a result, the Teutonic Knights fight in the Burzenland, a basin region to the southeast of Siebenbürgen, in 1230 and found their theocratic state there after the decisive battle.

Jürgen and the Knights

Lord Jürgen of Magdeburg has been with the order since its founding in the 12th century and has carefully tried to cultivate influence within it. But Hardestadt's childe does not have complete control over the Teutonic Knights. When Pope Honorius decides to use them as swords of the faith against pagans and heretics, the Cainites all too often need to hurry to get out of the way in time, and Jürgen and his court are no exception. The fact that Cainites could not enter Acre, the order's long-time center, until 1217 has helped to keep the order

as a whole largely free of vampiric influence. Jürgen managed to Embrace very few knights in the early nights of the order. His main means of gaining influence on the order, however, is subtle intelligence gathering or, in rare instances, making knights of lesser importance his ghouls. He is careful to do so infrequently, however, as forcing the blood oath on too many knights of the order would surely engender reprisals against the Ventrue.

An Order within an Order

Another important means of influencing the Teutonic Knights — and other monastic and similar institutions — has been the Order of the Black Cross. Its central figure is Lucretia of Hardtz, Jürgen's childe. She leads the other members, selected men and women who are all part of the Teutonic Order, to believe that the Black Cross is the secret heart of their order. As she "shows her devotion to the Black Cross by never facing the sun," the others follow her example. Of course, this is the first step on the road to damnation, and no few of these faithful men and women end up being ghouls or even Cainites after a time.

The Silent Fury: Murderers of Kings

On the 11th of May, 1224, a young German Brujah named Armin Brenner burned down the warehouses of a wealthy merchant in Magdeburg under orders from his sire. Unfortunately — and unbeknownst to the perpetrator — the merchant was a ghoul of Lord Jürgen, prince of the city. Brenner was caught and imprisoned in Jürgen's fortress, only to be freed by a coterie of armed Cainites 10 days later while awaiting the prince's justice. The four Cainites that broke him out of jail considered themselves *Furores*, but they had little in the way of true purpose. They had come together mainly out of common needs — all of them were running from someone or something — some 10 years ago, but lacking direction, they wandered the Holy Roman Empire aimlessly. When they passed through Magdeburg, they heard about the arson and mistakenly saw it as a thwarted attempt to light a fire of freedom in the heart of Lord Jürgen's oppressive reign. The four decided to liberate the unknown freedom fighter in hopes of gaining some ideological leadership from him. Brenner used his chance to escape from prison, immediately took the reins of the coterie and started giving the others what they expected from him — including a name for their band of anarchists. The Silent Fury was born.

Armin Brenner realized that his sire had used him as a pawn, and the thought infuriated him. In a letter

to Lord Jürgen, the coterie made its philosophies clear. The Cainites had taken up arms against the established lords of the night in the name of “freedom for the true undead — those Cainites with the courage to feed from whom we choose, to exist as we choose, and live, as the Dark Father said, by our own mercy.”

The Silent Fury is nominally a part of the Furores movement. Its members spout some of the same rhetoric as the Furores, and they are just as willing to use violent means to achieve their ends. Their ultimate goals, however, are much simpler and more terrifying. Full of anger, frustration and hate, they believe that the true utopia would be complete freedom from Cainite lords. They believe that mortals should do as they please without fear of being burned as heretics. In fact, they believe that nothing should be sacred except hunger and rage.

The Silent Fury is composed almost exclusively of Cainites on the Roads of the Beast or Sin (with one major exception). By lashing out against Cainites and vampiric institutions that they have identified as symbols of the hateful system, they hope to rally other oppressed Childer of Caine to their cause. The coterie consists of the following five members: French Toreador and troubadour Pierre Cardinal whose anti-royal songs made him notorious even in life; his childe, Mathilde de Moncourt; Feral Tzimisce Masha Ulitzakaya; German Caitiff Christoffel Weiß; and Brenner, their newest member. After siring Mathilde without permission, Cardinal destroyed his own sire. The two Sinners were then forced to flee France to escape Salianna’s wrath. Masha diablerized her sire when she tried to send her hapless childe into the war against the Tremere. Weiß doesn’t even know his sire. He simply awoke one evening in a ditch, forced to fend for himself.

Brenner followed their example and slaughtered his sire, a Brujah from Frankfurt, because the sire had knowingly sent him into danger and hadn’t tried to rescue him after the failed mission in Magdeburg. Brenner — who was a student in life and had always had a knack for philosophy — soon became the main ideologist of the coterie. The Cainite elders, he argued, seemed not to have learned anything from the fall of the Roman Empire. The main lesson was this: A large or clever enough army could bring down any empire. Armin Brenner, the only Scion of the Silent Fury, intends to raise that army.

Prime Targets

For the last few years, the Silent Fury, led by Brenner and Pierre Cardinal, has been traveling the Holy Ro-

man Empire, seeking political allies and hiding from its enemies. In carefully plotted attacks, the Cainites try to destroy elders who are especially identified with the oppressive system they resent so deeply and sometimes even diablerize them. All Cainite rulers have reason to fear them and their seemingly aimless destructive energy, but they list Lord Jürgen of Magdeburg (against whom Brenner still bears a grudge) and Julia Antasia (whom the Silent Fury considers a weakling beyond all contempt) as their chief targets.

Immediately after the Silent Fury freed Brenner, Jürgen called Lextalionis against the coterie. The only success so far was the arrest of Mathilde de Moncourt in October 1229 in a small town close to Magdeburg. No one was able to prove that the young Toreador had been part of the attack on Jürgen’s prison or the murder of a ghoulish guard. Nevertheless, she is still kept imprisoned in Jürgen’s fortress as the Prince of Magdeburg hopes that her sire and his fellows will come to rescue her as they did with Brenner.

In 1230, shortly after the Caitiff Albin returns to Magdeburg, Hardestadt sets him on the Silent Fury’s tracks, reasoning that the stealthy, canny Caitiff has as much chance of finding them as anyone and is quite expendable. The members of the Silent Fury discovered their “shadow” quite by accident, and recognizing that the Caitiff would make an ideal recruit for them, watch him just as he keeps following them. There have been several encounters between Albin and the coterie, even some extended discussions, but the Ghost has neither told Hardestadt their whereabouts nor decided to cast his lot with them. If he shows signs of doing his duty to his lord, the Furores will try to eliminate him.

Of course, joining the Silent Fury won’t be any safer for the Ghost of Magdeburg. If he joins with the Furores, Hardestadt not only loses a skilled spy, but Jürgen might potentially find out that his sire has been spying on him. Albin, of course, is woefully ignorant of these political nuances. Only time will tell the outcome of these complicated relations.

The Silent Fury is not truly a consideration for the elders at present. Jürgen considers them important enough to waste resources on (as does Hardestadt, after a fashion), but Julia and the other princes in the Fiefs of the Black Cross consider them an amusing little jumble of neonates making trouble. The anarchists, however, have the drive to change the face of the War of Princes, if only given some direction. Brenner is intelligent and learned, but he is not an especially good planner, and he is no more resistant to a persuasive voice in his ear than any other Cainite. It is only a matter of time before the Cainites who make up the Silent Fury run afoul of someone powerful enough to destroy them — or use them.

Notable Cainites

Lotharius - The Magus Prince

5th-generation Tremere, childe of Etrius, walker on the Road of Kings

Nature: Visionary

Demeanor: Autocrat

Embrace: AD 1030

Apparent Age: mid 30s

A number of rumors surround Lotharius. He is said to have been an oracle as a mortal mage; to be the founder of the Children of the Pyramid; to have personally diablerized more than a dozen Salubri; to be one of the Quaesitori, a secret Tremere society that acts as their clan's judges and executioners; to drink only mages' vitae; to be in league with a Nictuku; and to serve infernal masters. The truth is somewhat harder to quantify.

Lotharius was born in 984 in Cologne. The Order of Hermes noticed him in the city on the Rhine, and at the age of eight, he was introduced into the Order. The hard training by envious mentors made him ambitious and strong. He was tested harder than any older apprentice. He went through one hardship after another until he became one of the youngest masters and greatest hopes of the Order. As Lotharius soon saw himself hampered too much by the Order's strict rules, he started serving the Order as a traveling diplomat. He met Etrius of House Tremere in 1012 and became friends with him. On Etrius's advice, Lotharius conquered his wanderlust and was received with open arms by House Tremere in their chantry at Ceoris. Shortly thereafter, Lotharius vanished suddenly from his chambers in the chantry, which were locked from within. When he reappeared after what he thought was just a few days, nearly 20 years had passed. He never spoke about what happened in this period of time, but he wore a strange, haunted look that suggested he had seen things that no man was meant to witness.

He immediately recognized that much had changed in his absence. Etrius approached him with the offer of the Embrace, and after much deliberation, Lotharius accepted. (Etrius noted that Lotharius's final words as a mortal were, "If they have all time to realize their plots, I must have all time to stop them.")

Lotharius served the clan as a diplomat as he'd done for the Order of Hermes before. He never stayed in one place for long, but roamed the known world. Yet, in 1032, Lotharius received new orders. The Inner Circle moved him to Vienna and made him Pontifex of Austria as well as head of the Vienna chantry. Another order came from Etrius personally. Lotharius was to replace the Ventrue Valerianus as Prince of Vienna.



Lotharius is now prince, and the Tremere are the only true power in Vienna. Next to Tremere himself and his sire Etrius, he is the most powerful and dangerous member of his clan in Vienna. The Magus Prince himself is rarely seen in his own domain, though. Part of his attention is always directed toward the Balkans and his clan's ongoing feud with the Tzimisce of Transylvania. He never openly engages himself in that struggle but tries to undermine the Fiends' every move secretly. His eagerness in this aspect is partly motivated by his own knowledge about Shaagra's plans to expand westward (though how he gained that knowledge is something of a mystery).

Julia Antasia - the Roman Relic

5th-generation Ventrue, childe of Tinia, walker on the Road of Humanity

Nature: Visionary

Demeanor: Visionary

Embrace: 480 BC

Apparent Age: mid 20s

Julia Antasia was born to a wealthy family in the Eternal City itself. Her life hardly could have been better as she lived in a city mansion, surrounded by splendor and might. But she lived in a time of unrest. The *plebes*, the poor masses, rose against the patricians to take by force what they had been promised. Julia Antasia might not have become an important woman had she married another patrician to grow old at his hearth and finally to die from old age. Instead, she loved a plebeian, a common farmer who was deeply indebted to her father.

In spite of their mutual love, such a liaison was unthinkable, for the patricians had forbidden patricians to

marry plebeians. Julia did not intend to resign herself to this fate. She studied the Greek *polis* and fled the mansion one night to meet with some plebeians who wanted to formulate their demands. They knew what the patricians had promised but not given to them, but they lacked the rhetorical talent to express it. This was something the young patrician woman could make up for, for she had time and opportunity to study the Greek philosophers. Still she could not avoid her fate: Her father arranged a marriage with another patrician house.

Maybe it was her penchant for politics and her rhetoric skills, her common sense or her ability to convince those who listened to her. Maybe it was the fact that the marriage against her will did not break her and that she fulfilled her duties as expected, but still tried to better the plebeians' lot. Julia would never know exactly what made her sire Embrace her. None other than the Etruscan Tina led the patrician woman into the Clan of Kingship.

In the Eternal City, Julia Antasia soon became a member of the Eternal Senate of the Ventrue, an institution that was only possible within a republic. Every Ventrue had the right of speech, regardless of his age, and an ancilla's vote was as important as an elder's. The clan's traditions were not mere phrases, but iron laws. For centuries, Julia Antasia was active in this senate, and she helped delineate its course. In the immortal society, sex meant nothing, and she could finally be

what had been denied to her in life: a politician who worked for the good of all.

The wars against Carthage, though, already sealed the slow, but inevitable decline of the Ventrue senate and deeply divided the clan itself. Fueled by the early Caesars' genius and the mortal legions' successes, the influence of the Cainite lords of the Eternal City grew faster than they could understand at first. Flooded by wealth and power, keeping control became the first and foremost priority.

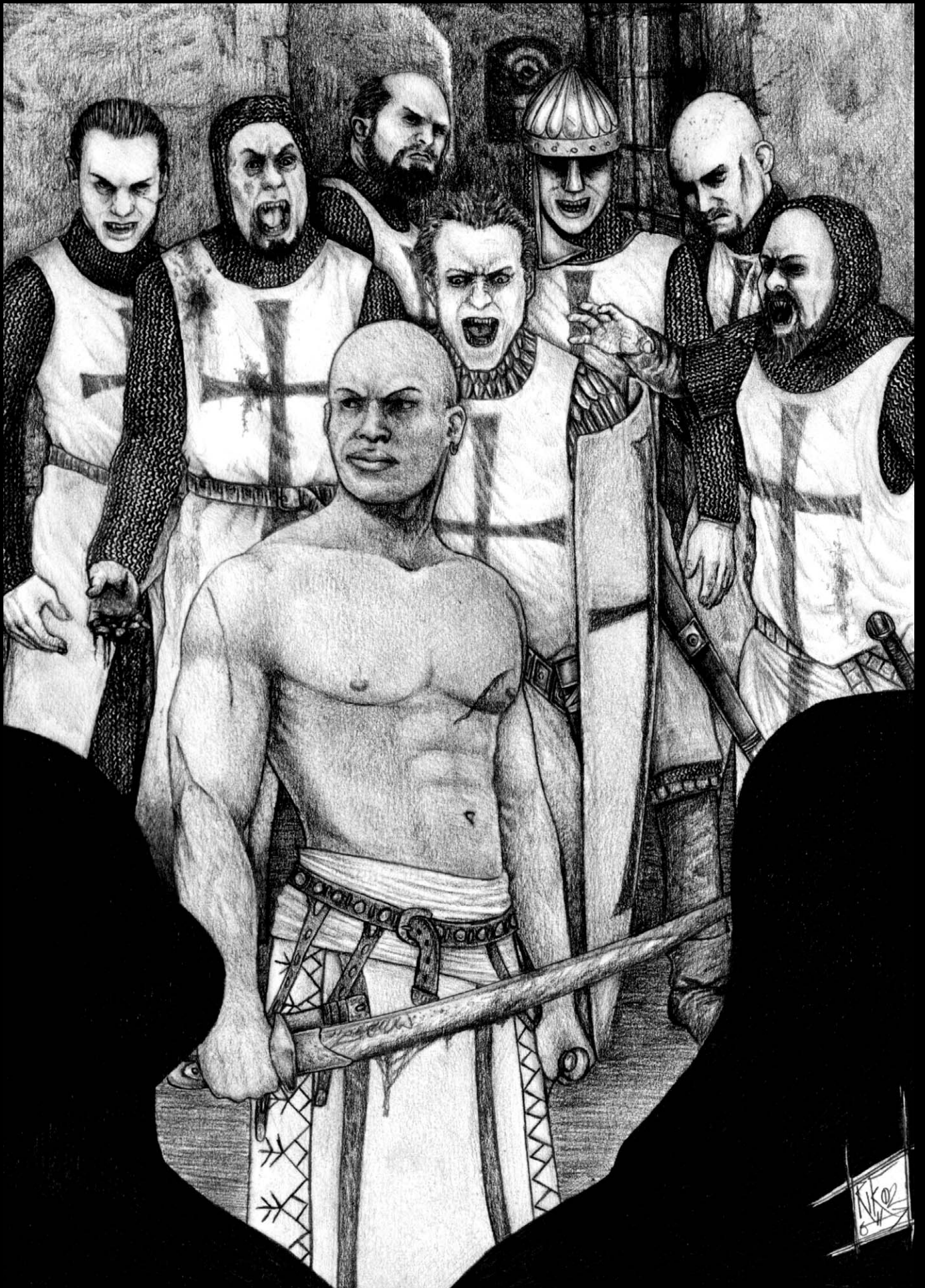
Soon, the Ventrue senate meetings became a playground and battlefield for the elders' overwhelming presence and their harsh words. It was standard procedure to force the young ones to be loyal via favors or the blood oath, and Julia recognized that the ideal she had upheld in her early centuries was only a feeble dream. In the fourth century, she turned her back on the Eternal City.

No one knows where she spent the following centuries. When Charlemagne's empire was divided between his sons, Julia appeared in a territory she knew as Germania Superior. She moved into an old Roman castle north of the city of Frankfurt and started searching for an old Nosferatu who was supposed to have been an enemy of Rome once. She hoped to gain insight about the first nights and the Antediluvians themselves from him. According to the stories, he had considered the whole area his domain for millennia. By gathering her progeny around her (who eventually made up the Antasians) and gaining influence on her surroundings, she was sure to eventually gain his attention.

And the Nosferatu elder who calls himself Angiwar finally contacted her himself, over 50 years after Julia had begun her search for him. Not even he could answer her questions regarding Ventrue's true words to his children, for in spite of his age, he had never encountered an Antediluvian. The two of them made a pact that allowed Julia Antasia to stay and keep her influence if she would use it to safeguard the secrets of the Nosferatu and his progeny. In return, Angiwar offered his knowledge and his progeny's support. Julia Antasia agreed and stayed in her castle in the Holy Roman Empire.

In all her centuries of existence, she has never forgotten where she came from and what made her what she is. Fueled by the ambitious way the Nosferatu follows his ideals — which are even more fanciful than hers in her eyes — Julia is looking for a way to revive the old Ventrue senate. Although she rarely takes part in the Antasian meetings herself, she has made it clear that she protects its members. Thus, she directly opposes Hardestadt and divides the Clan of Kingship in the Holy Roman Empire. Julia is willing to pay any price to revive her ideals.







CHAPTER FOUR: IBERIA

“Oh, Cid, give ear, and hearken, Oh faithful Campe-
ador!

For surely in this battle shall God himself make war,
And He will make thee worthy with Him therein to
share.

Where ’er thou deemest fitting bid us attack them
there.

Each man must do his duty. Upon them let us thrust.

On God and on thy fortune now hangeth all our
trust.”

—Song of the Cid, III.84

The Iberian Peninsula is a place of remarkable contrasts. Its landscape is exceptionally diverse, as are its people. Vast plains, large mountains and brushwood (as well as other fruit-bearing trees) mark the terrain, giving Iberia a unique appearance, particularly to those from more northern climes. The inhabitants are descendants of many peoples – Celts, Carthaginians, Greeks, Romans, Visigoths and Moors – and they show a remarkable ability to defy stereotypes. Yet all this diversity makes the peninsula’s current situation all the more difficult to comprehend in simple terms.

The central fact of Iberian life is the *Reconquista*, an effort by the northern Christian states to oust the Moorish kingdoms of the south. The Muslims came to Iberia in the early eighth



MORTALS

Ferdinand III of Castile — This king inherited the kingdoms of León and Castile in 1230, and he spends most of his time fighting against the Moors. His next conquest is the city of Córdoba in 1236.

James I of Aragon — Nicknamed “the Conqueror,” James I conquered the Balearic Islands and Valencia recently and has consolidated royal power within his realm. He continues to fight against the Moors, and he lavishly rewards nobles who serve him well.

Rodrigue de Navarre — A minor nobleman, Rodrigue founded the Sword of St. James, a mortal group dedicated to destroying Cainites and other “creatures of the night.”

Sancho II of Portugal — An impetuous and warlike king, Sancho II’s actions often elicit the ire of Church and state, some of whose elements are conspiring to depose and replace him with his brother, Alfonso of Boulogne. (They succeed in 1245.)

Sancho VII of Navarre — The last native king of Navarre, Sancho (called “the Strong”) is the last member of the older royal generation who fought at Las Navas de Tolosa. He has no children, and his crown passes to his nephew, the Frenchman Thibault of Champagne, in 1234.

century, invited, according to legend by a Visigothic nobleman who sought revenge against his liege lord. Under the great general Tariq (after whom Gibraltar — “mountain of Tariq” in Arabic — is named), the Moors found the Visigothic kingdoms of Iberia easy pickings, and they undertook a campaign of conquest that led them across the Pyrenees and into France. Defeated by Charles Martel at Poitiers in AD 732, the Moors nevertheless held most of the Iberian Peninsula and set about ensconcing themselves there.

Until the 11th century, Christian Iberia was on the defensive, while the Moors established an impressive society of art and learning, in which Muslims, Christians and Jews lived side by side, more or less amicably. While this isn’t to suggest that Muslim Iberia (or al-Andalus, as it became known) was a utopia, it was nevertheless a marked contrast to the rugged and

CAINITES

Badr (8th-generation Lasombra) — This mysterious vampire is a religious fanatic and Sultan of Granada. He has become a rallying point for Ashirra seeking to strike a blow against Christendom.

Guillermo (9th-generation Brujah) — This Cainite claimed the principedom of Coimbra from his Muslim predecessor by force of arms. He has now made that city a haven for vampires of all clans and affiliations.

Hilel al-Masaari (6th-generation warrior Assamite) — Sultan of Córdoba, Hilel knows the Muslim cause is doomed, but he cannot bring himself to abandon Iberia to Christendom without a fight.

Macario (8th-generation Brujah) — Lisbon’s weak prince is beset by enemies on all sides (including the Apostles of the Third Caine) and manipulated by his advisors. He may not survive the War of Princes, but who will replace him remains to be seen.

Mireia Subira (8th-generation Ventrue) — Prince of Barcelona. This Cainite nicely plays one faction against another within her domain, which is why Ventrue elders have yet not acted against her sometimes “innovative” relations with other clans.

Reinaldo de Rubio (8th-generation Lasombra) — A knight who became Prince of Compostela, Reinaldo is wholly dedicated to the Shadow *Reconquista*, making him a hero to many Christian neonates for whom the conflict has become a central facet of unlife.

Roque (6th-generation Malkavian) — Prince of Pamplona for centuries, Roque is extremely well balanced for a Madman. Regardless, French Cainites seek to unseat him as more of their kind appear in Navarre.

impoverished Christian states of the north. No one who looked at Iberia during this time could have guessed how much things would change in 200 years.

Spurred on by the militaristic kings of León and Castile, as well as the example of the crusaders in the Holy Land, Iberians took the battle to al-Andalus. Over the course of decades, the Christian forces won victory after victory, pushing back the Moors and reclaiming the peninsula for themselves. Despite the arrival of two different groups of North African groups (the Almoravids and the Almohads), who sought to reinvigorate what they saw as religious laxity among Iberian Muslims, the tide of history had turned. By 1212, at the Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa, Islam was on the wane, and three powerful Christian states — Aragon, Castile and Portugal — threatened to expel it forever. The days of Moorish glory are past.

THE LIONS OF RODRIGO

Named for the last Visigothic king to rule in Iberia before the invasion of the Moors, the Lions are a group of neonates and ancillae dedicated to the Cainite's Shadow *Reconquista*. Led by the Brujah zealot Felipe, the Lions wage nightly war against Muslim Cainites. They are merciless in their activities, giving no quarter and expecting none in return. They seek nothing less than the total annihilation of all Ashirra within the Iberian Peninsula. So great is their fervor – and their disdain for accommodation – that they attack even Christian Cainites whom they deem “traitors” to the cause of the *Reconquista*. Since Las Navas de Tolosa, the Lions have waxed powerful and are now a force to be reckoned with – a fact that doesn't escape would-be Cainite kingmakers.

Iberian nights follow a remarkably similar path. Christian Cainites wage a “Shadow *Reconquista*” against their Muslim counterparts (often called the Ashirra), taking little heed of clan. As the events of the Fourth Crusade proved (chronicled in **Bit-ter Crusade**), the Cainite world is far from united. Mortal politics and religion spill over into the realm of the undead, often with unfortunate consequences. Even the most broad-minded Cainites can see little hope for an accommodation between Christian and Muslim vampires. The best that can be hoped for is to delay the final reckoning until such time as a more equitable solution can be found. That's unlikely to happen, but even Cainites can dream.

Further information can be found in **Veil of Night** and **Iberia by Night**.

Al-Andalus

Al-Andalus is the name for the Muslim-dominated area of the Iberian Peninsula. This area is largely restricted to the south and is a pale shadow of what was once a vast empire. The Moors conquered almost the entire peninsula shortly after they entered Iberia in AD 711. Since its zenith in the 10th century, Muslim control of the region has declined significantly, thanks to a combination of the Christian *Reconquista* and disunity among the Moors. The last truly unified Islamic government in Iberia was the Umayyad Caliphate of Córdoba, which came to an end in 1031.

In the aftermath of the caliphate's collapse, two different waves of fundamentalist invaders entered Iberia from North Africa. The first were the Almoravids, who were dominant in the late 11th and early 12th centuries. Over time, the Almoravids became just as indolent and fractious as the Moors they replaced. The Almohads entered Iberia in the 12th century to restore unity to al-Andalus once more. Their success has been limited, resulting in a brittle Moorish empire in the south – ripe for the final push that will shatter its tenuous control over the southern peninsula.

The Battle of Las Navas de Tolosa in 1212 has dealt a serious blow to Moorish dreams of safety and expansion. The Christian armies of the north have shown a remarkable ability to set aside their political differences in the face of Islam. Indeed, Christian kingdoms can even count Moorish splinter kingdoms (called *taifas*) among their allies, a testament to their dual strengths at arms and diplomacy. Melancholy and defeatism are commonplace among many Moors. They see that the end of Al-Andalus is near, and they can think of no way to stem the Christian tide. The likelihood of further reinforcements from North Africa is small, as is the possibility that renewed religious fervor will make up for poor military strategy.

Mortal defeatism has counterparts in the Cainite world as well. Many Ashirra see no hope for al-Andalus, which leads some to abandon Iberia forever and head back to the more secure Muslim lands of North Africa and the Levant. Others take advantage of the power vacuum the deserters' exodus has created to establish themselves as the new rulers of southern Iberia. Others still dig themselves in and hope that they will be able to weather the coming storm, secure in the belief that Cainite politics need not be as simplistic as its mortal equivalent. These optimistic Ashirra hope that their Muslim faith will not prevent an amicable existence, side by side with their Christian brethren. Alas, their optimism is likely misplaced. More and more young Christian Cainites believe fervently in a violent creed that allows for no quarter with Islam.

Almohad Empire

The Almohad Empire owes its existence to a group of North African religious zealots known as *al-Murabbitum* or “the Warriors of the Faith.” Fired by their faith, the Almohads washed over southern Iberia and quickly ensconced themselves in several important cities, such as Córdoba and Sevilla,



the latter of which they chose as their capital. The Almohads had a twofold goal in Iberia. The first and most basic was to shore up the crumbling defenses of Islam in al-Andalus. They recognized that a disorganized and fractious collection of *taifa* kingdoms was no match for the increasingly unified Christian *Reconquista*.

The Almohads' second goal was to restore the fervor of other Muslims. For centuries, al-Andalus has had the reputation of being a paradise, a realm of beauty, science and tolerance. Even Western Europe imbibed and accepted these stories, looking to Muslim Iberia as an outpost of a civilization far more advanced than their own. Indeed, the universities and schools of Christian Europe owe a great debt to al-Andalus, without which translations of Aristotle and other classical authors would not have been possible.

Yet, where Europeans saw knowledge and wealth that they coveted, the Almohads saw only decadence and moral laxity. The Almohads had little interest in creating a paradise, especially if it weakened the position of Islam in the process. The North Africans viewed Andalusians as hav-

ing strayed from the Prophet's teachings, which is why they have suffered for so long at the hands of Christian armies. If they would only turn their gaze back to God rather than on the material things of this world, they might find victory in their grasp once more.

Unfortunately, the Almohads proved less than successful at both their stated goals. While they have slowed the collapse of al-Andalus, they have not reversed it. After Las Navas de Tolosa, Christian armies are in striking distance of Valencia, Córdoba and Sevilla. Badajoz fell in 1212, and Aragon conquered the Balearic Islands in 1229. Similarly, devotion to Islam has not noticeably increased, even among the descendants of the original Almohad invaders. Compared to the zeal of the Christians, Islam is in a sorry state in Iberia. This decline has encouraged the appearance of firebrand preachers, who exhort Andalusians to trust in Allah that He will grant them success. These preachers have proven ineffectual thus far, and the mood in al-Andalus has once more turned to defeatism or, at best, a hope for accommodation (rather than victory) with the Christian states of the north.

Córdoba

Córdoba is certainly one of the most splendid cities in the Almohad Empire, rivaling Sevilla in its wealth and beauty. Under the Umayyad Caliphate of the past, Córdoba was a renowned center of science and learning. Its schools and universities had no rivals in Western Europe. Indeed, Christians regularly consulted scientific and philosophical works that made their way into their hands from Córdoba. Just as remarkable were the city's medical schools, which taught techniques and treatments unknown in even the most cosmopolitan locales of Christendom.

Córdoba is still a remarkable city. Its schools remain important, and its wealth is as great as ever. In fact, Córdoba boasts over 500 mosques and contains nearly 1,000 public baths, not to mention other structures such as aqueducts, gardens and patios. Yet, the shine has started to come off the city. Castilian forces circle ever closer, and the Moorish administration shows the strain of coordinating its defense while maintaining such lavish public works. Córdoba still outshines most cities of Western Europe, but it does not stand as tall as it once did.

Christian scholars still visit the city, seeking its manuscripts and other tomes, but they do so with less regularity – or urgency. The creation of the Latin Empire of Constantinople has given Western Europe greater access to ancient texts than it has ever had. Therefore, the importance of Córdoba is waning, just as the Almohads are beginning to withdraw some of their support from what was once the pride of Andalusia. Within a decade, the city falls into Christian hands, and all that once distinguished it from the rest of Iberia ceases to be.

The Cainite sultan of Córdoba is the Assamite Hilel al-Masaari. Although deeply religious, Hilel is no suicidal zealot. Indeed, he willingly makes concessions to any who seek to protect the city and its treasures, even Christians and Jews. Since Las Navas de Tolosa, Hilel has become convinced that Islam is doomed in Iberia. This conviction has plunged him into a deep depression, one that his vizier, Enam al-Dimshaq, believes is the result of sorcery rather than simple emotional upheaval. She believes that the Lasombra Miriam bint Aisha is responsible for Hilel's state, but she can neither prove it nor provide an explanation as to why the Muslim Lasombra would act in such a fashion. Yet, Enam remains convinced that she is correct, creating a dangerous instability within Córdoba at a time when what it needs is unity.

Sevilla

Sevilla is a crowded city straddling the Guadalquivir River and dominating its east bank. The city's streets are narrow and twisting with many small plazas within its inner precincts. The city has a long history, having been inhabited successively by Iberians, Phoenicians, Carthaginians and Romans, all of whom were attracted to the silver and copper mines in the mountains to the north. The Moors first conquered it in 712, but Sevilla went its own way in 1031, when it rebelled against the Umayyad Caliphate of Córdoba.

The Almoravids re-conquered the city in 1091, and the Almohads claimed it in 1146. Since then, Sevilla has been the capital of their empire, which has made it a target of frequent raids by Christian forces. Despite the fighting on its northern borders, the city remains a place of incredible beauty and luxury. Sevilla has a reputation for being one of the most civilized places in the world, rivaling even Constantinople for its riches and exotic goods. This reputation brings many visitors to the city – both mortal and undead – who wish to partake of its wonders.

The Cainite Sultan of Sevilla is the Lasombra Gerushah bint Yoav, a Jew who converted to Islam after her Embrace. Distrusted by both the Ashirra, who consider her a weakling, and Cainite Jews, who consider her a traitor, Gerushah's rule is aimless and generally ignored by most vampires in the city. Several factions plot against her, believing that the danger posed by Christian forces demands that a stronger Cainite rule the city. A Cappadocian cabal, led by Aliyyah and the Lasombra Reyham both plot against Gerushah, each seeing themselves as better able to prevent Sevilla's destruction when the *Reconquista* turns its attention to the city. What neither faction realizes is that the sultan knows they are plotting against her and intends to strike back if the opportunity presents itself.

Silves

The city of Silves is located within a region known as the Algarve, a place of fruit trees and pleasant landscapes. Located on the sea, Silves is also an important naval base, and it has been since the Moors first invaded Iberia. The city has remained loyal to each successive Muslim government that has ruled the region – the Umayyads, the Almoravids, the Almohads. Its inhabitants have long hoped that its loyalty would not be forgotten, especially now that Portuguese forces have begun to make more raids in the area around the city.

Since 1210, even its supremacy on the sea has been called into question. Portugal has employed foreign mercenaries, many of them Englishmen, to fight against the Silvan ships – with increasing success. This has led to appeals for assistance from the Almohads but to little avail. Instead, many Muslims have begun to flee Silves, heading southward toward Granada, which seems like the only safe location in the southern peninsula. With each year, the city seems more like a ghost town and will become even more so as the threat of a Portuguese invasion looms ever larger.

The mortal depopulation of Silves has had profound repercussions for the Cainites living there. With a smaller herd from which to feed, many Ashirra have fled south, following the refugees to Granada. This Cainite exodus serves the city's sultan, Muhammad ibn Farouk, quite well. Although he claims to be Lasombra, Muhammad is in fact a Baali, who slew the former sultan of Silves and took his place. From the shadows, he plots with his other clanmates to turn the city into a Baali stronghold. His ultimate plan is to allow Silves to fall into Christian hands so that the Baali gain easier access to the larger world of Iberia. To that end, Muhammad has even initiated tentative discussions with the Apostles of the Third Caine in Lisbon, believing they may prove useful cat's-paws when the time comes.

Valencia

Valencia is an important seaport, lying on a bend in the Turia River some two and a half miles from the ocean. The Romans established the town as an agricultural center, constructing irrigation systems and laying the foundations for the region's later reputation as the fruit and vegetable basket of Iberia. These systems would be expanded and improved under Arab rule. The Visigoths moved in when Rome collapsed, but the Moors eventually displaced them in 711. Under Muslim rule, Valencia soon became a rich agricultural and industrial center, noted for its ceramics, paper, silk, leather and citrus fruits. Physically, the city is somewhat drab, with no spectacular mosques or monuments.

Yet, its association with Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar – El Cid – makes it well known nevertheless. Rodrigo and his companions ruled Valencia for only a short while. In 1102, the Almoravids recaptured the city for Islam, where it eventually became an important center of regional power. A *taifa* kingdom grew up around Valencia, one that the Almohads conquered in 1172. Since then, they have protected the city

EL CID

Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar is probably the single most important figure in Iberian history, at least as far as the *Reconquista* is concerned. He began his illustrious career as a poor knight, banished from Castile for breaking a truce between that kingdom and the *taifa* kingdom of Toledo. Rodrigo then set out with a small group of companions and fought relentlessly against the Moors. His skill in battle and honorable ways earned him the respect of even Muslims, who first dubbed him by his famous title (a corruption of *Sayyid*, an Andalusian Arabic word meaning "Lord"). In 1094, El Cid conquered Valencia and ruled it until his death in 1099. His glorious life then passed into legend, becoming the basis for innumerable tales and songs, many of which Iberians use for inspiration in battle.

El Cid's exploits struck a chord with many young Cainites, particularly of Clan Lasombra. Legend has it that Rodrigo was offered the Embrace but refused it (although his companion Tercio Bravo accepted), which only increases his stature in vampiric eyes. Young Cainite knights frequently visit El Cid's tomb to keep "the Vigil," spending an entire day there before entering the warfare of the Shadow *Reconquista*. This practice has aroused the attention of Muslim Cainites, who seek to end it before El Cid's legend inspires even more young vampires to take up arms against them.

against the advance of Aragon, which now controls the Balearic Islands, which gives the Christian kingdom an excellent opportunity to strike Valencia from the sea.

Cainite Valencia is in the midst of a civil war of sorts. Its previous sultan, the Malkavian Abdullah the Wise, was a pragmatic ruler who cared little for mortal politics. When El Cid ruled the city, Abdullah instructed the Ashirra to respect his dictates and to avoid interfering with his supporters, except to the extent they affected Cainite matters. When Muslim rule returned, a Lasombra religious zealot named Abu al-Fulani appeared in the city, encouraging the Ashirra to cast off Abdullah for his "treason" to the cause of Islam. Abdullah fled Valencia and al-Fulani became its new sultan. Under his rule, he stresses Muslim orthodoxy, which leads to clashes with Christian Cainites. Now, Abdullah

has returned and is rallying his forces to retake the sultanate. Among his allies is the powerful Gangrel Shabaqo the Nubian, who believes that al-Fulani threatens Valencia's prosperity by his religiously inspired rule.

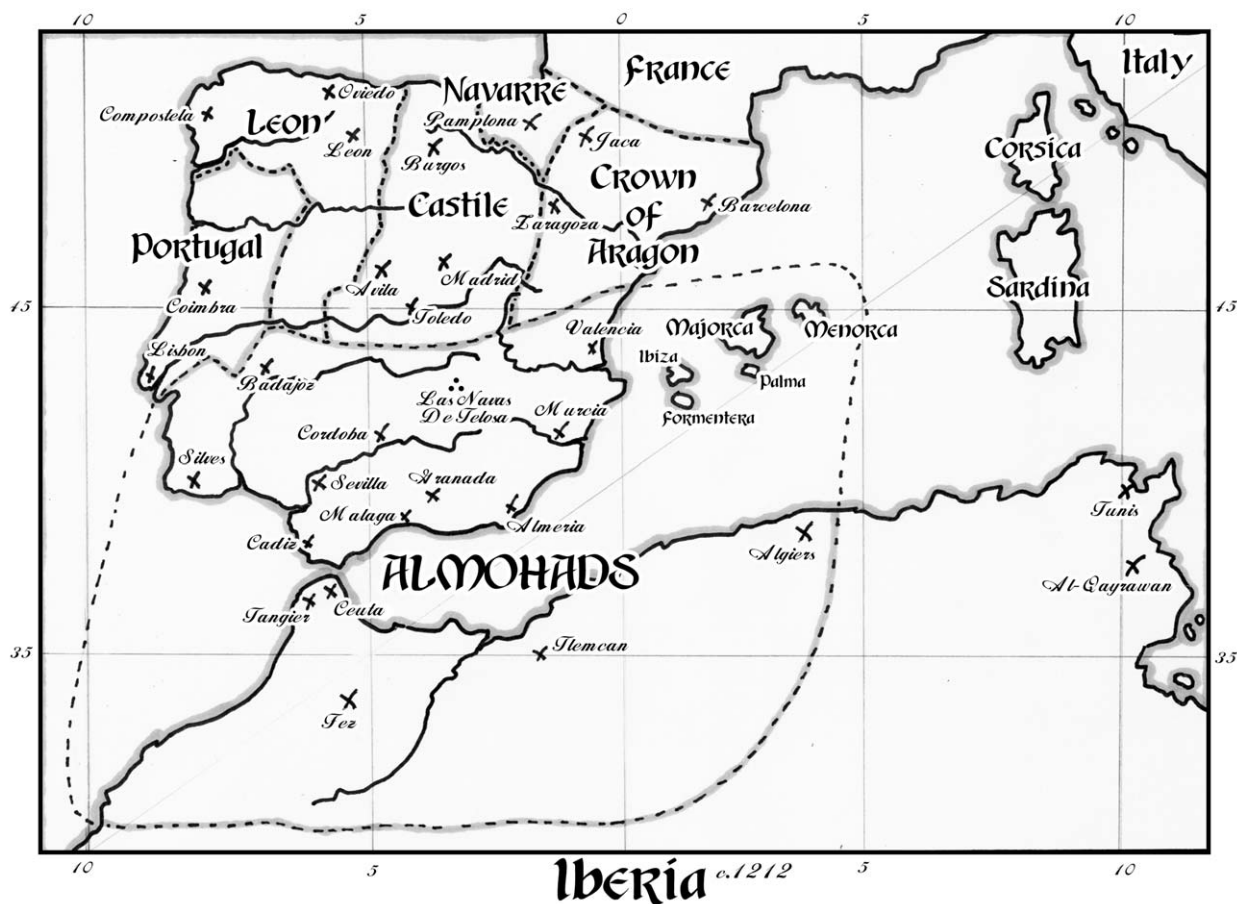
Taifa Kingdoms

After the collapse of the Umayyad Caliphate, al-Andalus lacked unity. Even the Almoravids proved incapable of providing that unity. Moreover, the North African invaders were unable to exert control over all of Muslim Iberia, being limited to only half the area formerly ruled by the Umayyads. The other half of al-Andalus became disorganized and broke up into several smaller Moorish states. Ruled by particular factions (or *taifas*), these small states are chaotic and competitive, fighting against one another as well as the Almoravids and, later, the Almohads.

Nevertheless, the *taifa* kingdoms stimulate trade, art and learning, which makes them attractive targets for Christian attacks. Their lack of unity and mutual antagonism also makes them easy targets. Consequently, many *taifas* enter into vassalage relationships with Christian states. In some cases, the

taifas pay taxes that function as "protection money," keeping the *Reconquista* from their doorstep as long as they continue to provide the Christians with revenue. In other cases, the relationship is much stronger. The *taifas* must provide military support as well, participating in battle even against other Moors. This conflict creates a great deal of tension and resentment, as various elements of Muslim society grapple with whether survival is worth betraying one's fellow believers.

Interestingly, the mortal political situation in the *taifas* makes them attractive locales for Cainites who simultaneously wish to take advantage of Muslim civilization and avoid becoming involved in its conflicts. Many *taifa* cities boast a sizable Nosferatu population dwelling in their well-developed sewer systems. Likewise, Toreador and Gangrel find the *taifas* much to their liking, because they can pursue their aims without as much interference as they might encounter in either more solidly Christian or Muslim areas. That's not to say that the *taifas* don't have their fair share of religious-minded Cainites, but, by and large, they contain fewer than other cities do. Exceptions such as Granada are noted in the descriptions that follow.



Granada

Granada is in an unenviable position. On one hand, it is safe from the worst fighting of the region, geographically separated and with its back to the sea. On the other, this safety creates an expectation in the eyes of some Moors that Granada will rise to the defense of the Almohads in the face of the *Reconquista*. So far, the rulers of Granada have opted for a middle course by accepting the waves of refugees that flee from more northern regions of al-Andalus. Beyond that, they have not given in to the blandishments of either the Almohads or the Christians, both of whom court Granada as a potential ally.

The Cainite sultan of the city, the Lasombra Badr, has opted for a much different course. Instead of adopting a conciliatory tone, Badr is a fundamentalist who has expelled all dissident Cainite elements from his city. In this way, he's gained the support of the Assamite blood sorceress Nazirah, whose opinion carries a great deal of weight among the Ashirra. Of course, not all Cainites support Badr, and, in fact, many believe that his religious zeal may be his downfall. Chief among them is the vizier Farid, who points to the increasing number of Christian victories as proof that negotiation and diplomacy are viable options. Badr does not listen to Farid's calls for moderation and presses his own agenda, even as more moderate voices begin to appear in Granada. It's quite conceivable that Badr could be toppled from power, especially if someone could convince the usually pragmatic Nazirah to withdraw her support.

Murcia

Murcia was founded in 825 by 'Abd al-Rahman II as a dependency of the Umayyad Caliphate. The city remained small and insignificant until 1146, when Muhammad ibn Mardanish came to power, with Castilian support. Ibn Mardanish called himself *El Rey Lobo*, or "the Wolf King," and adopted an almost wholly Spanish lifestyle. Although this idiosyncrasy didn't endear him to his subjects, he was nevertheless a powerful ruler who held the city against the Almohads until his death in 1172. Then, the North Africans moved into the city and established a nominal presence there. Murcia has been functionally independent since Las Navas de Tolosa, and it grows more so every day.

Murcia is geographically isolated from its closest neighbors, Castile and Granada, which suits its

THE AMICINOCTIS

The so-called Friends of the Night are the leaders of Clan Lasombra. Comprising those Cainites who've proven themselves in service to the clan, the Friends set policy for the Lasombra and sit in judgment of individuals who have disputes with other members of the clan. The Friends' permission must also be sought before any Lasombra can commit Amaranth upon another member of the clan (the clan refers to this consultation as a Court of Blood). Calling upon the aid of the Friends of the Night incurs one a debt that must be repaid at some point, although there is no guarantee that it will be called immediately. Some Lasombra labor under a debt to the Friends for centuries. Similarly, a service done to the Friends can give a Cainite access to immense power and influence.

Since the beginning of the *Reconquista*, the Friends have observed a policy of non-interference in disputes stemming from the conflict between Islam and Christianity. Although it was far from a perfect solution, it had the support of the Methuselah Montano and, through him, Lasombra himself. Therefore, it came as a surprise when the Friends declared a blood hunt against Omar al-Aziz of Murcia, whom they found to have committed unauthorized diablerie in 1172. The fact that his victim was a Christian Lasombra enraged Ashirra within the clan, who suggested that the Friends had a bias in favor of Christendom.

Since then, the Friends of the Night have slowly come to favor Christianity over Islam and Iberia. Although some Friends still maintain a façade of impartiality, it's clear whom they support. That favoritism has increased tension between the two factions within Clan Lasombra, and violence between them is increasing. Without the Friends to mediate these disputes, it's all but certain that the War of Princes will prove a terrible time for the clan.

rulers well enough. Although they theoretically support the Almohads in their efforts to stem the *Reconquista*, their commitment is minimal – it doesn't have to be anything more. Instead, the Murcians tend to the agriculture that is the mainstay of the city's economy. Extensive irrigation canals,

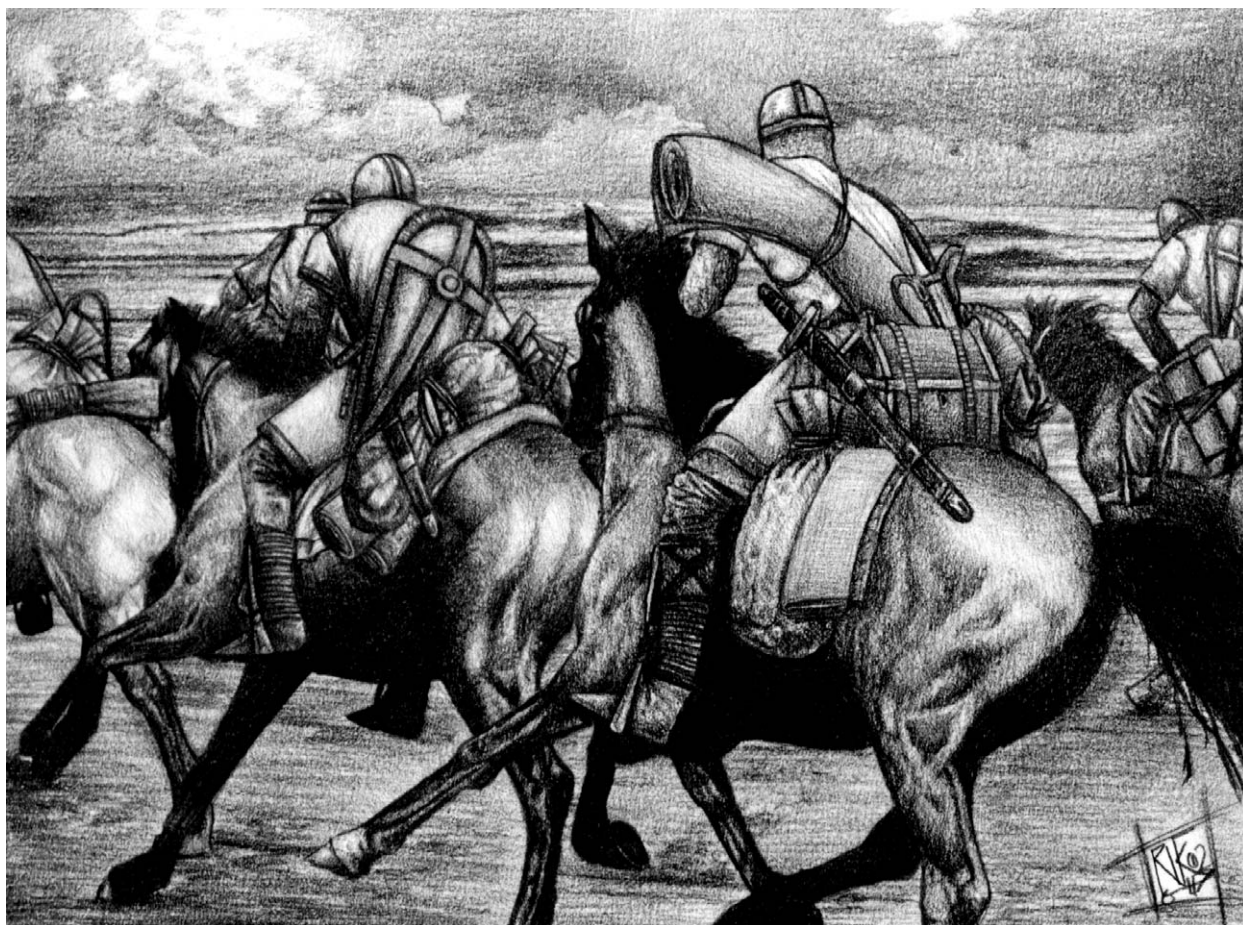
waterwheels and aqueducts exist to help the locals cope with the arid environment of the surrounding countryside. Because these amenities are so vulnerable to attack, Murcia makes every effort to appear innocuous and hope to be somehow bypassed by the larger events of the peninsula.

The city's Lasombra sultan, Omar al-Aziz, hasn't followed the lead of the mortal Murcians. He came to power in 1172 by assassinating his predecessor, whom he considered to have made too many concessions to the Christian vampires in the area. Omar then executed the Christian Lasombra ambassador to Murcia, without even consulting the *Amici Noctis*. This act turned the *Amici* against the Muslim cause, which, until that point, it had treated as a mortal matter. Now, the *Amici* largely look unfavorably on the Ashirra, even Muslim Lasombra, and encourage their destruction whenever possible. Allies of the previous sultan have decided to throw their support behind Castilian Lasombra, hoping their actions might heal the breach between the *Amici* and Islam. It's a daring gambit and one that could well alter the balance of power if it succeeds.

Aragon

Aragon, or "the Crown of Aragon" as it is known, is the easternmost kingdom of Christian Iberia, bordering the Mediterranean Sea. Its lands are extremely mountainous and covered with forests, as well as fruit-bearing plants. The Ebro River and its many tributaries plow through its territory, providing irrigation for its growing population. Aragon includes within it the County of Barcelona, a Catalanian region whose people have their own unique language and traditions.

Aragon's interests are widespread, given its access to the sea. Because of a marriage between the heiress of Aragon and Count Raymond Berenguer III of Toulouse, the kingdom became embroiled in French politics. In 1213, for example, King Pedro II marched an Aragonese army into Provence to defend his lands against the Albigensian Crusade. It's unclear whether Pedro did so out of sympathy for the dualist heretics or simply to protect his feudal vassals, but the act drew the attention of the Apostles of the Third Caine, some of whom believed Pedro was their long-awaited messiah. When he was killed



APOSTLES OF THE THIRD CAINE

The Apostles are an offshoot of the Cainite Heresy that broke away from the See of Nod around AD 1000. Like several of the mortal Catholic monastic orders, the Apostles are a reform movement within their faith. They believe that their austere and simple ways will inspire other Heretics to abandon the indolent See of Nod and join them in preparing the way for the vampiric messiah to come.

This messianic streak — some would say obsession — distinguishes the Apostles from most other sects of the Cainite Heresy. The Apostles genuinely believe that the prophecy of the Third Caine shall come to pass within the next few years. Strangely, they expect the Third Caine to be a mortal. They believe that vampires cannot redeem themselves; that is a task only mortals can perform. Therefore, an exceptional person will appear among the Children of Seth and reveal his messianic status through signs and portents. Once these signs are recognized, it falls to the Apostles to grant this mortal the Embrace so that he may assume his proper place as the Third Caine — and savior of all Cainites.

The Apostles are strongest within Aragon and Portugal. The Aragonese branch acts covertly because it must, lest it attract the attention of Archbishop Monçada, who wishes to exterminate the cult. The Portuguese Apostles, on the other hand, openly flaunt their activities, since neither the mainstream Heresy nor Christian Cainites hold much sway in that realm. Both groups promote a different candidate for the messiah. The Aragonese originally favored Pedro II, but they have since switched to James I. The Portuguese continue to favor the deceased Sancho I, whom they believe did not die but has gone into hiding in preparation for his glorious return.

in battle against Simon de Montfort, the Apostles looked elsewhere for their savior (see Chapter Two for more information).

Pedro's son, James I, continued to expand Aragon's interests beyond the Iberian Peninsula. In 1229, he launched an invasion of the Balearic Islands of Majorca, Minorca and Ibiza, which had been a haven for Moorish corsairs for generations. Aragon's seagoing interests make it the most outward

looking of the Iberian kingdoms. It's conceivable that, when the *Reconquista* is over (or at least in a period of peace), Aragon may turn its gaze elsewhere, such as France or Italy, where it still maintains diplomatic and commercial contacts.

Aragon is important to Cainite society, because Archbishop Monçada's child, Lucita, was a member of its royal family during her mortal life (a daughter of Pedro I). Acting on behalf of her sire, she keeps an eye on the mortal court of the kingdom for signs of the Cainite Heresy. Monçada grows increasingly obsessed with the Heresy and its virulent offshoot, the Apostles of the Third Caine. He is convinced that Aragon's contacts with Provence make it ripe for infiltration by this vampiric cult — and he's right.

A small coterie of Apostles, led by the Lasombra Guillem Savall, has set itself up in Aragon and has gained mortal agents in the court. Unsurprisingly, the Archbishop of Nod, the Tzimisce Nikita of Sredetz, has sent emissaries to Savall, hoping to bring the schismatic Heretics back into the fold. Savall has rejected these entreaties, and he continues to worm his way into Aragonese life. Monçada, meanwhile, rails against the Apostles and his own clan's efforts to court them for their own purposes. Lucita can only laugh at the ludicrousness of it all, and she slowly sets off down her own path, independent of all factions.

Barcelona

Barcelona is one of the oldest and most important cities in all of Christian Iberia. Founded by the Carthaginians and expanded by the Romans, the city occupies a strategic location on the Mediterranean coast — further support for Aragon's growing sea power. The Visigoths considered Barcelona important, as did Charlemagne, who incorporated it into the "Spanish March" in the eighth century. The city — and the rest of Catalonia — became part of Aragon when Petronilla, daughter of King Ramiro, married the Count of Barcelona in 1137. Since then, the two realms have been united under the Crown of Aragon, even though some Catalonians chafe under the rule of the Aragonese, with whom they do not even share a common language.

Even so, Aragon does everything it can to ensure Barcelona's continued happiness under Aragonese rule. They pour money into the city and rebuild its defenses and ports. Troops constantly throng the city now, making their way toward King James's invasion of the Balearic Islands. Colonists bound for the Islands are also commonplace, many of them

from the frontiers of Aragon. Their unfamiliarity with Catalanian ways has caused several noteworthy incidents of public violence, which the king has attempted to downplay, lest it spill over into something greater.

The Cainite prince is the Ventrue Mireia Subira, the childe of the original prince of the city, Ramón Vera. She has initiated a policy of tolerance within her domain, a move that has won her the respect of neonates at the expense of elders, who would prefer a less flexible approach. Given the Ventrue's current weakness in Iberia, Mireia considers it a wise approach and has rebuffed the elders, who have made no move against her thus far. The Apostles of the Third Caine have a presence here, as do mortal witch-hunters dedicated to their destruction. In addition, foreign Cainites from ports as far away as Constantinople can be found here, adding to its cosmopolitan flavor. Thus far, Mireia has managed to prevent the outbreak of violence between the various Cainite groups, a move that marks her as a far more astute prince than many would give her credit for.

Zaragoza

Located in north-central Iberia, Zaragoza (which the Aragonese called Saragossa) has been an important city since Roman times, when Cainites of Clan Ventrue first established themselves there. The Moors conquered the city shortly after entering the peninsula. The Ventrue prince, Flavius Sidonius, attempted to work with the Ashirra, but they largely ignored his attempts at rapprochement. The Muslim Cainites established a separate sultanate within Zaragoza, leaving Flavius with his unlife but bereft of the power he'd known for hundreds of years. For the proud Ventrue, that was a fate almost worse than Final Death.

Aragon conquered Zaragoza in 1118 after a lengthy siege. The Aragonese then set about eliminating traces of anything relating to the Muslim occupation, a practice Flavius has adopted as well. Of course, the prince hasn't been as successful as he'd like, since he has little love for Christianity, which he long considered a "religion for weaklings." This attitude has limited the assistance he's received in extirpating the Ashirra from Zaragoza. Under Aragon, Zaragoza has become a solidly Christian city, with innumerable churches and monasteries. Its people have a triumphant air about them, secure in their belief that the *Reconquista* will soon be over and that Aragon will be victorious.

Since Las Navas de Tolosa, Flavius has attempted to make overtures to Christian Cainites, including members of his own clan. Ventrue elders such as Aldegunda and Olayo have spoken of replacing Flavius. They consider his long-standing hostility toward Christianity to be a potential source of succor for the Ashirra within Zaragoza. Flavius realizes how precarious his position is, which is why some of his advisors recommend he make a public conversion to the Christian faith, a move that, if done properly and with appropriate sincerity, might overcome the growing resistance to his rule. Thus far, Flavius has rejected this suggestion, but the fact that the prince is considering it at all is proof of how much things have changed in the past few years.

Castile

Castile derives its name from the large number of castles and fortifications that dot its rugged landscape. During the last century, the kingdom has undergone many changes. Chief among these has been its relationship with the neighboring kingdom of León. The royalty of each realm has intermarried with the other for years, resulting in many temporary alliances and unions between the two kingdoms. After Las Navas de Tolosa, the preeminent position of Castile became apparent, and work was begun on a more permanent union of the two crowns. That union is finally achieved in 1230, under King Alfonso VII. Now, Castile (or Castile-León, as some call it) is the premier Christian state of Iberia and at the forefront of the *Reconquista*.

The territory of Castile consists of three distinct areas. The oldest is that once held by León and is a land rich in history – a source of pride to its native. León was a stronghold for the Visigoths who were not conquered by the Moors. It is the birthplace of the *Reconquista*, a fact locals do not hesitate to announce to anyone who will listen. Old Castile is another proud area, and it too has long resisted the Moors. New Castile is the portion of the kingdom that has been added most recently. It consists largely of lands in the central plateau, and its rulers are knights who have been allowed to settle the lands they conquer in Castile's name. This arrangement gives New Castile the flavor of a military encampment, which isn't far from the truth.

The Cainites of Castile are almost solidly behind the *Reconquista*. Clan Lasombra is powerful here, as are the *Amici Noctis*. This shouldn't be surprising, since Archbishop Monçada has established his haven




within Castile. The Ashirra who still exist within the kingdom's borders are isolated and on the run, without much likelihood of support from anyone except other Ashirra. Similarly, the Apostles of the Third Caine are also weak, a result of a campaign of rooting out these Heretics and destroying them whenever possible. The Lions of Rodrigo operate freely within Castile, inspired by the legend of El Cid, which the Lasombra promote as a way of channeling the zeal of neonates.

Compostela

Compostela is one of the most famous cities in Christendom. Located in the northwest of the peninsula, on the Atlantic coast, the city has never been conquered by the Moors, thanks to the protection of its patron saint, James the Greater (or so the locals claim). Legend tells of a miraculous boat that brought the bones of the Apostle to Compostela, where they were interred beneath the city's cathedral. Stories also say that Saint James has appeared mounted on a white horse and brandishing a sword. In one famous battle, the saint is credited with slaying thousands of Moors, earning him the name *Matamoros*, or "Moor Slayer."

The city's association with the saint has made it a popular pilgrimage site, the third largest after Jerusalem and Rome. Pilgrims from all over Europe travel to Compostela. Those who have done so earn the right to wear cockleshells as a badge of their devotion. On several occasions, the Moors have attempted to destroy the city in order to dishearten the Christians. Every time they failed, which has only emboldened mortal and Cainite alike. The Lions of Rodrigo, for example, use Compostela as a base from which they strike against the Ashirra. The city also boasts a large population of foreign Cainites, brought to the area by stories of its spiritual qualities.

The Lasombra have a solid grip on Compostela in the person of its prince, Reinaldo de Rubio. In his mortal life, he was a knight who would have died during one of the Moorish raids against Compostela had his sire not Embraced him. Now, he supports the *Reconquista* with a fervor of few other Cainites. Reinaldo does not believe in accommodation or compromise. He even sponsors young warriors who wish to prove themselves in battle. He channels the neonates' energies toward



the Ashirra and their mortal counterparts, hoping they will wreak havoc elsewhere rather than in his domain.

Madrid

The occasional residence of the King of Castile, Madrid is built around a fortress. Indeed, many walls and towers surround the city, making it a fitting home for the Castilian monarch. Located on a promontory that overlooks the Manzanares River, Madrid boasts extremely hot summers and cold winters. These extremes color the people who live here as well. They are quite boastful of Madrid's growing accomplishment and passionate about its prospects for the future. Indeed, there are those who expect Madrid to displace Toledo as capital of Castile, something the king has never suggested even if it makes a great deal of sense.

Madrid is the domain of the Lasombra. Three of its most important figures, Ambrosio Monçada, Silvester de Ruiz and Nastasio make their havens here. All three direct the Shadow *Reconquista* from within the city's high walls. Ironically, they allow Ashirra and Jewish vampires to continue to exist in Madrid. They do so not out of any principled tolerance, but because they feel they are potentially useful tools, especially as the mortal *Reconquista* enters its endgame. Provided the Jews and Ashirra feed only on their own kind, they are not harassed and indeed are offered some degree of protection against Cainite zealots who would destroy them.

Toledo

Toledo has long been a capital city. The Visigoths held Toledo before it was captured in 712, and the Castilians reclaimed it from the Moors in 1085 after a lengthy siege. Most Muslims fled the city, but many Jews remained, partially because the Christian rulers instituted an unusually tolerant attitude toward them. Over the years, the Jewish Quarter has thrived and a small Muslim compound has grown up as well. Relations between the three religions are as good as can be expected, given Christianity's dominant political position. Toledo boasts a remarkable collection of scholars of all faiths and this, along with trade, attracts visitors from all over Iberia.

Cainite society is extremely volatile in Toledo. Its previous prince, the Lasombra Tercio Bravo, was removed from power at the instigation of Elieser de

Polanco, one of the clan's leaders in the Shadow *Reconquista* against the Ashirra. The Lasombra maintain loose control over the city's nights, despite the ongoing disputes between the followers of Bravo and de Polanco. In this mix are a wide variety of Cainites, of all clans and affiliations – one of the reasons it's so difficult for any single prince to take power for very long. To date, the strife between factions has largely taken the form of politicking and diplomacy, with only occasional outbursts of violence. How long that will remain the case is unknown.

Navarre

Navarre is an oddity on the Iberian Peninsula. Older than most of the other Christian states and with a proud history, it seems to have no future. Navarre is hemmed in geographically by Aragon, Castile and France. It does not participate in the *Reconquista*, except in the most vague of ways, sending some of its knights to fight on the front lines of a war that long ago ceased to matter to the kingdom.

Once, during the reign of Sancho the Great (1000-1035), Navarre could have formed the nucleus from which a strong Iberian state would be formed. Sancho divided his vast lands between his three sons, however, and it has never played a prominent role since. In 1054, Castile forced Navarre to pay tribute, and France exerts an increasingly large influence over the realm. Indeed, the Navarrese royal family has intermarried with French nobility, guaranteeing that the kingdom looks to the north for its future rather than the south. As the *Reconquista* enters its final phase, Navarre is pushed increasingly to the sidelines, and it's unlikely to play a significant role in Iberian politics ever again.

In the Cainite world, Navarre also stands apart. Ventrue and French Toreador dominate the scene, with a good number of Malkavians and Nosferatu as well. The Malkavians are a tightly knit brood, and they view Roque, the Prince of Pamplona, as a father figure to whom they defer for guidance. The Nosferatu, on the other hand, are intensely loyal to Navarre. Some, like the elder Ezkerra, wage a guerrilla war against the Toreador who have "invaded" the kingdom since establishing closer ties with France. The Ventrue are a vestige of better times, when the Romans and Visigoths ruled supreme in the region. Embittered and sullen, they despair of ever regaining the power they once knew.

Pamplona

The capital of Navarre stands at the southern end of the pass of Roncesvalles, where the Muslims defeated the Frankish army under the command of Roland. The defeat was immortalized in *The Song of Roland*. The city is probably best known for its festival in honor of its patron saint, Fermine. Fermine was Pamplona's first bishop, and his feast day is celebrated by the running of the bulls, during which time the animals are set loose in the streets while men young and old run before them, hoping to avoid being gored by their horns. Not all of them are successful. Pamplona is also an important trading center, bringing merchants from France and northern Europe to the Iberian Peninsula.

At the moment, Pamplona is a city of intrigue and diplomacy. As King Sancho VII advances in years, his lack of an heir becomes ever more significant. As things are now, Count Thibault IV of Champagne stands to inherit the kingdom should Sancho die. Emissaries from Aragon and Castile work to prevent that outcome, though, feeling that Iberia would be better served if Navarre remained out of the hands of "foreigners." Sancho has rejected these entreaties so far, so Frenchmen are becoming ever more common in Pamplona, adding to the sense that Navarre no longer matters to the flow of Iberian history.

The Malkavian Roque is Prince of Pamplona. He rules his domain erratically, alternating between a light and a heavy touch as suits his whims. This has led some, such as the Toreador Baldomar, to believe that Roque is weak, possessed or both. Roque is actually very much in control of his faculties, though (for a Malkavian), and he understands his childer better than any outsider ever could. His seemingly erratic behavior is, in fact, calculated to flush out his opponents so that he may crush them. In the centuries since Roque gained power, he has done so many times. He's likely to do it many more, even against such a rival as Baldomar, who considers himself a superior breed of Cainite.

Portugal

Portugal is the youngest of the Iberian Christian states, founded in 1139 by Alfonso I Henriques,


who came from Léon to create his own kingdom. Ironically, he spent his early reign fighting the Léonese as often as the Moors, since Léon did not initially recognize Alfonso's claim to independence. Once he had achieved recognition from the Holy See, Alfonso set about adding to his domains. In 1147, he elicited the aid of English and German crusaders to conquer the city of Lisbon. Since then, Portugal has always been a land in which foreign soldiers have been welcome. Indeed, the kings of Portugal have encouraged their presence by offering them land and titles in exchange for ousting the Moors from the western reaches of the Iberian Peninsula. This practice has created some resentment among native Portuguese, but it's nevertheless accepted because of the security it's brought the kingdom.

Portugal has had a rocky history of relations with both the Church and its Christian neighbors. King Sancho I, for instance, seized ecclesiastical lands and infringed upon the rights of prelates with impunity. While this act earned him the enmity of Rome, it also endeared him to the Apostles of the Third Caine, who saw in him a potential vampiric messiah. His death in 1211 has not affected their ardor – in fact, it has strengthened it. Under their leader, Balesquida, they are certain that Sancho did not die but merely hides himself from mortal and Cainite eyes until the time of his revelation is at hand. Then, he shall return and lead the Apostles into glory.

Brujah vampires are also powerful in Portugal. While some elders look on the days of Carthaginian rule in Iberia with nostalgia, younger Zealots see only the opportunity for battle and honor. They do not reject notions of a Cainite utopia so much as ignore them. With the *Reconquista* in full swing, they say, now is not the time to speak of such things. These neonates and ancillae instead devote themselves to battling Cainites from al-Andalus and other Christian kingdoms, seeing the present as a time to prove oneself in displays of martial skill. Like their mortal counterparts, Portuguese Cainites have a reputation for hot-blooded zeal and impetuousness.

Coimbra

Coimbra is the capital of Portugal, having been captured from the Moors in 1064 by Léon. Alfonso I, however, took the city for himself when



he established Portugal as independent of Léon. Despite its importance politically, Coimbra is a small city, far smaller than Lisbon, which outshines it in most respects. Nevertheless, its pleasant climate (which is rumored to have restorative properties) and cosmopolitan character gives Coimbra a unique charm. The kings of Portugal lavish money on the city, erecting strong walls and other defensive elements. In addition, they maintain several palaces here, which makes it the city to which diplomats and legates arrive when they enter Portugal.

For this reason, Coimbra is also an important contact point in the Cainite world. Its Brujah prince, Guilherme, is young as vampires go — barely two centuries out of the Embrace. He claimed the principedom by force of arms from its Muslim sultan, who held on to his power despite the city's changing hands in the mortal world. Guilherme is surprisingly pacific for a Brujah, and he has initiated few martial endeavors since coming to power. In fact, he's shown the exact opposite tendency, acting as a mediator between Christian Cainites and Ashirra. Doing so has earned him the respect of moderates on both sides, but has angered fanatics like the Assamites and the Lions of Rodrigo, both of whom view Guilherme as a threat to their own agendas. Meanwhile, elders within his clan openly wonder whether Guilherme is attempting to rebuild Carthage in Coimbra, a plan the prince denies even as his actions suggest otherwise.

Lisbon

Although it is not the official capital, Lisbon nevertheless enjoys a position of honor within Portugal. Located on the Tagus River, the Greek hero Ulysses is reputed to have founded the city during his attempt to return home after the Trojan War. An important seaport during Roman times, the Moors conquered and held it until 1147, when Alfonso I Henriques liberated it. Under Portuguese rule, Lisbon's fine port has come into its own. Traders and soldiers from all over Christendom enter Iberia through Lisbon, bringing with them goods and arms to assist in the *Reconquista*.

The presence of so many people in Lisbon makes it appear far larger a city than it actually is. Indeed, the miles of walls that surround Lisbon — as well as the danger of Moorish armies — have

prevented the city from growing as its population might require. For the moment, the king hasn't seen fit to fund an expansion of Portugal. Instead, he invests in improving its battlements and wharves, seeing these as the keys to victory in the battle against the Moors.

Lisbon's Brujah prince, Macario, is somewhat weak, being easily led by his advisors and courtiers, which makes the city a battleground between a variety of mutually hostile forces, many of them imported along with the foreigners who throng the city's streets. The Apostles of the Third Caine maintain a sizable presence in Lisbon. Their leader, Balesquida, has set himself up in Lisbon and openly preaches his blasphemous faith to other Cainites, much to the chagrin of both the mainstream Heresy and orthodox Christians. Meanwhile, neonates swarm the city in search of adventure, caring little for Macario or those who manipulate him for their own ends.

Into the midst of this scene came the Lasombra Vicente de Cardona. He arrived in Lisbon as a representative of his clan, and he has wormed his way into Macario's court. Vicente uses the prince's weakness to his own advantage, securing for himself a place in the city, all the while working to undermine the Brujah's hold on Lisbon. There's little doubt that Vicente seeks to become prince himself, but few seem to care. Neither the Apostles nor the younger Brujah involve themselves much in local politics, and Macario's own courtiers see Vicente as just another piece in their quest for power in the city.

Of course, the Apostles play a significant role in Lisbon's life. Aided by a Cappadocian named Nyssa, these Cainites have established the city as the epicenter of the cult of King Sancho as the Third Caine. When Sancho died in 1211, Balesquida announced that this confirmed a prophecy from *The Book of the Shining Blood*, the heretical bible used by the Apostles. Sancho had gone into hiding, just as the *Book* had prophesied, and it was the duty of the Apostles to prepare the way for his return. Nyssa is intrigued by the Apostle's devotion to this unusual belief. It's unclear whether she accepts it herself, but, being a Cappadocian, she's unwilling to pass up the chance to investigate tales of a mortal who overcame death without first accepting the Embrace.

Notable Cainites

Ambrosio Luis Monçada,

Keeper of the Faith

6th-generation Lasombra, childe of Silvester de Ruiz, walker on the Road of Night

Nature: Monster

Demeanor: Judge

Embrace: AD 1153

Apparent Age: mid 50s

Ambrosio Monçada is a difficult Cainite to understand. A devout Christian, he nevertheless believes that his undead state is a curse from God, proof that he is forever damned. Yet, he also believes that his damnation frees him from the strictures under which a Christian must otherwise act. Consequently, Monçada has embraced his vampirism as a means to serve Christendom – by doing cruel and blasphemous things that no follower of Christ should ever have to do. Therefore, he opposes the Cainite Heresy in all its forms (he has a particular hatred for the Apostles of the Third Caine), as well as Islam. At heart, he's a pragmatic man, who maintains contacts even with his enemies if he feels it serves his overall agenda, namely the conquest of the entire Iberian Peninsula by Christianity – with Clan Lasombra pulling the strings from the shadows. Monçada is a formidable opponent, who is willing to wait for years for his plans to come to fruition. His only weakness appears to be his childe, Lucita, for whom he has feelings that go beyond those of a sire for his brood.



Badr, Sultan of Granada

8th-generation Lasombra, childe of Marcos, walker on the Road of Heaven

Nature: Fanatic

Demeanor: Autocrat

Embrace: AD 809

Apparent Age: indeterminate



Badr gives heart to those Ashirra who do not wish to accept the inevitability of Andalusian defeat. The fact that she hides her gender from all but her closest allies only adds to her charisma. Many Cainites in Granada and elsewhere believe that she is actually a eunuch, but none suspect that she is a woman. Her impassioned orations in support of a Muslim counterattack certainly do not reveal her true nature, which is why so many Ashirra have rallied to her cause. Badr recognizes that Islam cannot reach accommodation with Christendom. To do so would be to play into the hands of master manipulators like Ambrosio Luis Monçada, who already spin webs of treachery across the peninsula. Consequently, Badr has decided to fight fire with fire, employing strong-arm tactics to convince other Ashirra to toe her line and work against the *Reconquista*. Although it's unclear whether Badr's approach will succeed, it has certainly restored the morale of Granada's Cainites, who now genuinely believe that they have a chance of weathering the *Reconquista*, despite the growing number of Christian victories since Las Navas de Tolosa. Her stance has also attracted the attention of Christian zealots such as the Lions of Rodrigo, who have targeted her for Final Death if the opportunity presents itself.

Balesquida, Apostle of the Third Caine

8th-generation Lasombra, childe of Anastasio, walker on the Road of Heaven

Nature: Fanatic

Demeanor: Rebel

Embrace: AD 962

Apparent Age: late 30s

The Asturian Cainite Balesquida was initiated into the mainstream Cainite Heresy as a ghoul. When his sire turned against the Heresy and accepted the new gospel of the Apostles, Balesquida followed his lead. Over time, he became an even more fervent believer in its unusual teachings. Balesquida is not one to flee from conflict, which is why the Apostles have gained such a high profile in Portugal, eliciting the ire of Vibius Fimbria, the leader of Heresy in the region. Even the death of Sancho I in 1211 has not deterred the vigor with which he pursues the cult's ends: conversion of all Cainites before the day of Gehenna when the world will be cleansed with fire, leaving only the faithful Apostles to inherit the kingdom of Caine. Nevertheless, Balesquida is as methodical and calculating as any Magister. He rarely acts rashly or without forethought. It's just these qualities that have made him such a thorn in the side of Christian and Heretical Cainites alike.







CHAPTER FIVE: ITALY

Oh, enslaved Italy, place of sorrow
Ship without captain in a storm,
Not respectable lady but place of corruption....
—Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*

The cities of northern Italy are preparing for war in 1230. Frederick II, Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire and King of Sicily, returned from crusade in Outremer last year. The Holy Roman Emperors have long claimed northern Italy as their rightful lands. Most of the city-states rejected this claim and fought hard against Frederick's predecessors to maintain their independence. The members of the Lombard League (the alliance of towns opposed to Frederick and the empire) wait to see whether Frederick will again try to press his imperial claims to Northern Italy.

Pope Gregory IX waits as well. The pope claims the middle third of Italy as his territory, but he rarely has sufficient military power to enforce that control. Should Frederick II conquer northern Italy, the Papacy would be caught between Frederick's current lands — which include the entire southern third of Italy — and his new northern conquests. War between the empire and the Papacy itself is possible.



MORTALS

Ezzelino III da Romano — Lord of Verona. Ruthlessly ambitious noble with Ghibelline sympathies. Favored kine of Livia of Ravenna.

Frederick II — Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, King of Sicily and Naples. Ambitious monarch recently returned from Outremer and considering his options in Northern Italy.

Giacomo Tiepolo — Doge of Venice. Former Duke of Crete and podestà of Constantinople. A man more focused on consolidating Venice's far-flung colonies than affairs on the Italian mainland.

Gregory IX — Pope. Reformer and politician interested in expanding and consolidating papal power in Italy.

Peter of Verona — Dominican friar-inquisitor who seems dangerously knowledgeable about Cainites.

The cities are merchant powers. They must earn enough money to import grain, or they will starve. Their surrounding farmlands cannot supply them with enough grain to feed more than half their populations. War endangers this trade, because trade routes are disrupted, shipments seized, farmland burned and peasants killed. But being vassals subject to imperial taxes is no better for trade. The cities of the Lombard League hope, but do not really expect, that Frederick II will content himself with his territory in Sicily and Naples and with Germany.

Italian merchants do business in every port of the Mediterranean, at the Champagne Fairs, in London, in Flanders, in the Holy Roman Empire and along the Black Sea. Enterprising merchants are even exploring across the Sahara to the African kingdoms and along the Silk Road to the Mongol courts. (Marco Polo leaves for the Orient in 1271.) This network of trade has brought wealth and power to Italy's industrious citizens. Merchants use Arabic numerals, double-entry accounting, insurance and bills of exchange. The Templars are the supreme bankers for Europe, but Italian banks are swiftly becoming challengers.

Immense wealth is also giving rich merchants and guilds a voice in town government, challenging the traditional control of urban nobles. The *popolo*, or people, are demanding representation on town councils and in town offices, and a voice in choosing their leaders. It is a heady, revolutionary time.

CAINITES

Anicius the Golden — (8th-generation Lasombra) Rival Prince of Florence with Guelph sympathies. Were he not distracted by his battles with Panfilo, he might be a strong leader of the Guelph Lombard Cainites.

Augustus Giovanni — (4th-generation Capadocian) Head of the Giovanni family in Venice. Primarily occupied with expanding his family into the Venetian Mediterranean colonies.

Fabrizio Ulfila — (5th-generation Ventruel) Currently in Bologna seeking promising university students as pawns, ghouls and childer. Opposes other clans who seek to gain clerical influence in Rome or among the Dominicans through Bologna's students. A potential Guelph leader if he weren't busy with other plans.

Panfilo the Cruel — (8th-generation Lasombra) Rival Prince of Florence with Ghibelline sympathies.

Bandecca Manelli — (7th-generation Brujah) Champion of the popolo in Florence, allied with Anicius.

Cato (Nosferatu ghoul) — Information broker for the Nosferatu in Rome. A useful guide to consult about mortal or immortal Roman politics.

Guilelmo Aliprando — (6th-generation Lasombra) Prince of Venice. Currently locked in conflict with Alfonso of Venice, Prince of Constantinople (see Chapter Eight), over control of Venice's colonies in the eastern Mediterranean. Both Alfonso and Guilelmo are concerned with Greek Cainites' efforts to oust the Latins from Constantinople and restore the Greeks.

Henricus Germanus — (8th-generation Ventruel) Prince of Siena, in the midst of disputes with two Lasombra elders in Siena's countryside and a group of Tremere within the city. Henricus is a powerful Ghibelline spokesman willing to covertly lend his ghouls to Frederick II's wars.

Livia da Ravenna — (7th-generation Ventruel) De facto Prince of Ravenna and patron to Ezzelino III da Romano. A Ghibelline supporter embraced during the waning nights of the Roman Empire.

Tommaso Brexiano — (8th-generation Lasombra) Prince of the Venetian colony of Negroponte. Currently trying to keep the Latin Emperors of Constantinople and ousted Greeks focused on Outremer and the Muslims, not on Christian infighting.

ANATIONINNAMEONLY

In 1230, Italy is more an idea than a country. There is no single language, no agreed-upon weights or measures, no agreed-upon coinage, not even an agreement about on what day the year begins. To the extent that there is any national feeling, it lies mostly in either supporting or opposing the Holy Roman Empire.

This chapter is about the geographic area that modern readers think of as Italy, from the Alps to the border of the Papal States, about two-thirds of the length of the peninsula. It includes Corsica, Sardinia and Venice's major colonies in the Adriatic and Mediterranean. Sicily and southern Italy are part of the Holy Roman Empire and are discussed in Chapter Three.

Trying to keep track of the shifting alliances and wars between city-states is futile for any but the most dedicated scholar. This chapter will discuss the major cities and their traditional rivalries. The broad strokes of the major rivalries are more important than the nuances. If Pisa supports a city, then likely Venice and Florence will oppose that city, each for their own reasons, and not necessarily as allies. The enemy of one's enemy is not always one's friend. The Storyteller should keep in mind the basic goals of the major mortal factions and remember that Cainites may be drawn into mortal politics in Italy, just as they have been on various crusades.

The City-States

In most of Europe, the nobility dominates the political landscape. Northern Italy, however, is dominated by city-states. Northern Italian city-states are autonomous republics; some acknowledge the Holy Roman Emperor as their nominal sovereign. The city-states in the Papal States are more or less subservient to the pope, but actual control varies widely by the strength of any particular pontiff. Southern Italy and Sicily are basically feudal.

Each city-state is a tiny self-governing and fiercely independent republic. Most have town councils, an elected leader and open-air assemblies. Voting is limited to adult male citizens with a certain amount of property. This system and independence is unique. Cities elsewhere in Europe may have charters or communes (government by council), but they are still subservient to the local baron, count or king.

Politics in the city-states are violent. Supporters of local notables literally battle each other in the

streets and alleys for control of the republic's councils. Nobles can kill merchants and artisans with virtual impunity. Therefore, the merchants and artisans gather together for mutual self-defense and demand a place in the city government and justice for their wronged. When things get out of hand, the poor form a mob and riot against the worst oppressor.

When one faction wins control of a city, it exiles its most prominent rivals. The exiles go to a nearby city controlled by their factions' allies and plot their return. If they can successfully return, they expel their rivals, who join their own allies and plot. It's a fractious, divided system, but somehow it all works well enough to satisfy the residents and allow merchants to make a great deal of profit.

Governance

Trying to influence a city-state is much harder than trying to influence a baron or count. For the most part, the republics are worried about being dominated by any one family or person, so they take great pains to restrict and divide power. A Cainite prince will have considerable trouble trying to direct local affairs. (In roughly 50 years, some city-states experiment with rule by a hereditary duke — *signora* — which proves no less fractious and violent than communal rule.) Cainites Embraced within the past century or so, however, will chafe at the idea of a single unchanging prince directing their actions.

In 1230, only a few cities are controlled by a single family. Lasombra princes encourage moves toward single-family and hereditary control over the cities as a way to secure their own power bases. In the meantime, they may well encourage violent politics to make mortals believe that democracy is a messy, failed experiment that should be abandoned for traditional autocrats.

Traditional Levers of Power

For the politically minded Cainite, three basic sources of power predominate in a city-state. Most city-states are ruled by an elected or appointed administrator called the *podestà*. *Podestàs* are chosen from neighboring city-states because strangers are deemed more likely to be honest, and less likely to have local family or friends whom they might favor. Terms in office are short — anywhere from six months to a few years. The *podestà*'s finances and acts are carefully scrutinized after he leaves and before he is paid. It is not generally worth the effort for a vampire to suborn a *podestà* unless she has immediate ambitions, as the *podestà* will only be in a city for a short time. If the

EZZELINO III DA ROMANO

Ezzelino is the most famous sole ruler of 1230. In 1225, Ezzelino III took control of Verona and is busy trying to extend his influence into neighboring cities. In 1236, he allies with Frederick II. Frederick gives him his illegitimate daughter in marriage and lends him an army of 500 knights and 100 archers, which Ezzelino uses to capture the neighboring cities of Padua and Vicenza.

Once he allies with Frederick II, Ezzelino rules not in the name of the republic or the popolo, but as Imperial Vicar or merely "Lord." He forbids the Inquisition in his territories, refusing to allow a rival to his own power. Cathars and other heretics peacefully reside in his lands. It is a haven for such people fleeing inquisitors in Italy and France.

Ezzelino dies childless in 1259. He does not establish his own family in his holdings. When he dies, the republics revert to their old forms, but other republics experiment with the stability of appointing nobles as life-podestàs. Eventually, around 1260, prominent noble families such as the Visconti, Gonzaga, d'Este and della Torre begin to rule city-states as *signoria*.

The Papacy accuses Ezzelino of all manners of blasphemy, heresy and misdeeds as part of the pope's attack on Frederick II and his allies. In Dark Medieval Europe, the Papacy's accusations are well founded. Ezzelino is the favored kine of Livia da Ravenna, who was Embraced during the waning days of the Roman Empire and strongly supports Frederick's imperial ambitions.

podestà is popular, though, he may be appointed by other cities and could become an agent in one's rival's cities. A Cainite needs to be subtle in his influence; if a podestà is too obviously a partisan of any particular faction or family, then he will not be hired.

The second major source of power is the legislative council, sometimes divided into a small Great Council and a larger general council. In some cities, the council has only a few members. In others, it may have several hundred. Some councils are elected, others are appointed, and still others are chosen by lot from among a list of eligible candidates. Generally, the councilors and electors are drawn from the traditional noble families (the magnates). In a few cities, the lesser general council is elected by the popolo.

The larger the council, the harder it is for any Cainite to reliably predict its actions, let alone exert

influence over it. In future decades, some city-states create ever-smaller Great Councils, which prove easier for the insidious Cainites to affect. As it stands, most princes have some sway over the magnates who themselves are, or have influence over, the councilors.

The third source of power, and one of recent invention, is the popolo — part militia, part trade union, part political party, part mutual defense society and part social group. Almost all city-states have a popolo of some kind by 1230. Some members of the popolo are wealthy commoners who are ineligible to participate in the ruling councils because they are the *nouveau riche* and not of noble blood. Others are prosperous artisans, shopkeepers and crafters who wish to lobby for better rules, taxes and food prices. The urban poor and rural farmers are not normally part of the popolo.

A popolo can have its own statutes, elected councilors (priors or *anziani* — elders), and a Captain (often a noble appointed from a neighboring city). The popolo is usually part of the republic's government and bureaucracy, allied with one or more noble families. When it opposes the republic, the poor may join it and riot. It is possible, but not common, for the Captain of the popolo to be elected podestà at the same time. Many republics are wary of placing this much power in one man's hands, however.

Older Cainites and those of noble birth often do not understand the popolo. The idea of commoners sitting in judgment over nobles seems to be against nature and God. The idea that common people can demand justice against a noble who kills or rapes a commoner seems completely alien. Cainites Embraced in recent decades from among the merchants and artisans may well sympathize with the popolo and understand how to use it to influence the city-state.

Bishops

Bishops are far less powerful in northern Italy than they are elsewhere in Europe. If an English noble is aggrieved by a bishop's decision, it takes months just for an emissary to travel to Rome and petition for redress. If a Florentine council is aggrieved, the papal curia is only days away. This gives Italian bishops far less autonomy than their more distant counterparts. Moreover, the struggle between the Papacy and the emperor makes the Church seem much more like just another ambitious landholder rather than a moral leader possessed of divine grace and wisdom. Theology and accusations of blasphemy and heresy are used as political weapons more often in Italy and Germany than elsewhere in Europe, eroding the clergy's moral (and temporal) authority.

The lands owned by bishops, monastic orders and the new mendicant orders tend to be smaller than those elsewhere in Europe. This too reduces the power of bishops and abbots.

Finally, bishops are also often elected from local noble families, thus drawing them into the web of alliances and vendettas within the republic. Since bishops are elected for life, democratic city-states are suspicious of their power and try to restrict it.

Guilds

Guilds are another source of power. Many towns have powerful guilds. Members of the guilds are generally proven masters of their trade or profession. Workers are merely associates of the guild. The most powerful guild members — usually the notaries, judges, bankers, moneychangers, wool merchants, silk merchants, doctors, apothecaries, wool manufacturers, fur-dealers and goldsmiths — are often leaders of the popolo or have official roles in councils.

Guilds are not just alliances of manufacturers. They regulate manufacture, set standards, maintain one or more churches, host feasts and festivals, pay pensions to their elderly members, widows and orphans and set wages for their workers. Guild statutes forbid workers to rebel, to take oaths of solidarity, to try to

combine or organize, to strike or to boycott their work. Guild masters can beat workers, but workers cannot lay hands on their masters. Cheap labor is vital to most merchants' survival. Wars, plagues or famine can drive many guild masters into poverty.

Guilds are often governed by a council of masters. The Florentine *Arte della Lana* (Wool Guild), like the republic, appoints someone from outside the city as its inspector. The inspector (*officialis forestierus*) has six guards and uncounted informers. He can impose fines, beat, torture and even behead workers for misdeeds, using substandard materials or sabotage. He can cut off the right hand of anyone who is permanently in debt to the guild with no possibility of repayment.

Cainites Embraced in earlier centuries and those of noble birth may disdain the mercantile ambitions of guilds, as trade is beneath their dignity. Cainites Embraced from the merchant classes see the guilds' potential power, and in fact an offshoot of the Road of Kings called the Path of the Merchant has gained considerable momentum in Italy.

The Condato

The countryside (*condato*) is vital to a city-state, but not a major source of power. Most landholders live in the city during the spring, fall and winter,



then retire to country estates during the hot summers. Serfdom is being replaced by sharecropping, where farmers lease their fields and livestock from year to year in return for a percentage of their crops, eggs and other products, either in cash or in kind. Peasants who own and farm their land are uncommon.

The republic sets ceilings on grain prices to make sure that the city is kept well fed and the urban population does not become restless. The laws, courts and contracts all favor urban landowners and forbid rural boycotts or land-strikes. A rural community can be fined the value of the deemed production of any land it failed to cultivate. The republic also demands rural labor at minuscule wages for drainage projects, forest clearing, road building and bridge repairs.

In northern Europe, the city air can free a serf, if he can survive there for a year or more. In Italy, republics watched for farmers and had treaties to return them to their rural homes. Robin Hood legends of heroic resistance to the republic are rare.

Even with strict control over the countryside, the largest city's *condato* only grows enough food to feed the city for half a year or less. For the rest, cities have to trade for grain all along the Mediterranean coast. These grain shipments are literally the life-blood of the cities, which will go to war to protect their ships and merchants.

A wise Cainite maintains a country estate or refuge to which he can flee during urban unrest. Cainites are not dependent on grain for food, but if a city's residents are starving and fleeing, the Cainite suffers alongside them.

City-States by Night

The city-states are crowded with Cainites, often more than the urban population can readily support. Cainites looking to establish themselves may infiltrate one of a city-state's major families, making selected members into its ghouls and embracing from the family. Doing so gives the Cainite a ready base of power and protection but immediately brings him into the family's alliances and vendettas. And if the family is exiled from the city in a political struggle, its houses may be burned or sacked — which means that the Cainite almost certainly goes into exile as well, moving with his family into some foreign city or abandoning them.

Some Cainites have allies in multiple factions, allowing them to stand above the mortal fray and change pawns during unrest, but this balancing act is a dangerous one. It is generally safer in Italy to stand with one party or another than to stand with both or neither. This is because due to the prodigious number

of Cainites in the city-states, vampires who dip their fingers into more than one family are seen as greedy and dangerously power-hungry (and also tempting targets, as they tend to overextend themselves). Some Cainites simply try to avoid the whole affair, making their havens in abandoned Roman aqueducts or catacombs. Others seek their pawns within the Church, reasoning that while families might come and go, God (or at least religion) endures.

Guelphs and Ghibellines

Northern Italy has few overarching factions. Probably the most important division is whether one supports the Papacy, and thus the independence of the republics, or one supports the emperor and the imposition of a central power over the republics.

Two factions have emerged. The Guelphs, in theory, were the party of the Papacy; the Ghibellines, the party of the Empire. (The names come from German factions within the Holy Roman Empire.) Calling oneself a Guelph or a Ghibelline, however, often has little to do with the large picture and much to do with local politics in one's own city-state. Bartolo of Sassoferrato, an Italian historian writing in 1355, explained that the names of the two parties — Guelphs and Ghibellines — bore no relation "either to the Church or to the Empire, but only to those factions which exist in a city or in a province."

The factions are just forming in 1230. In a few years, the nobles in most republics are divided into Guelph and Ghibelline factions, each with their own captains and councils, each with military and diplomatic goals, and each competing for power within the city's governance. This structure will be added onto the already complex interplay of *podestà*, councils, *popolo*, guilds and the cathedral chapter.

The roots of the Guelph-Ghibelline struggle are in the Papacy's relationship with the Holy Roman Empire. The Papacy has long claimed lands in central Italy, but it lacks the military force to control and defend those lands. When the Papacy needs an army to expand its territory, expel invaders or quell unrest, it calls on the Holy Roman Emperor. The emperor, in turn, relies on the Papacy's support for its legitimacy in Germany.

The emperor's army comes across the Alps through northern Italy demanding tribute and oaths of loyalty from the northern communes along the way to central Italy. Once the Papacy's problem is solved, it realizes that the empire is a threat to its territorial sovereignty and encourages the emperor to return to Germany. If he is reluctant to leave, it encourages unrest among the northern communes to draw the emperor out of

central Italy. The emperor battles with the northern communes and is eventually drawn back to Germany to quell unrest among the nobles who have grown restless in his absence.

A few decades later, the cycle starts again.

The most recent struggle between the republics and the empire started with the coronation of Frederick I Barbarossa as Holy Roman Emperor in 1152. Frederick believed that he was entitled to all sorts of duties and moneys in northern Italy, including military service, taxes, fees and monopolies, but the cities were not willing to grant him any of these rights. Milan led the rebellion. The Papacy needed Frederick's help against the Normans in Sicily at this point, so it was willing to support him in return for his aid. By the time the Normans were quelled and Frederick was ready to turn his attention to the northern communes, the Papacy had decided he was a bigger threat than the Normans and refused to aid him. Frederick took advantage of the then-pope's death to influence the papal election in 1159, causing a schism. The schism was settled when Frederick I was defeated by a league of the northern communes at Legnano in 1176. In 1183, Frederick signed the Treaty of Constance, acknowledging the independence of the northern

Italian republics. He agreed that the cities had the right to elect their own consuls, build fortifications and enjoy their past customs.

Frederick's son Henry (later Emperor Henry IV) was too busy with problems in Germany and in southern Italy to interfere with the republics.

Frederick I's grandson, Frederick II, also has ambitions to unite Germany and Italy into one empire. He likewise has a complex and difficult relationship with the Papacy over southern Italy. The northern republics are wary in 1230. They expect Frederick II to try to assert his rights as emperor but hope not to have to fight another war.

Their hopes will be dashed in 1231, when Frederick II announces that the republics are illegal, and none should usurp the role of appointed royal officials. Communes that try to appoint podestàs, consuls or rectors would suffer "perpetual desolation, and all the men of the city should be held as perpetual forced laborers." Anyone who accepts such offices would be executed.

It is a declaration of war. The Lombard League is re-formed. Cities line up as allies or foes of the emperor. Guelph parties expel Ghibelline nobles from the republics they control and vice-versa. Politics shift along with the fortunes of war, making this a tumultuous and unsettling time for Italian Catholics.



The Papacy

Every major political figure, mortal and undead, knows who the pope is. The best-informed can name important cardinals and papal advisors. The Papacy is the moral backbone of Dark Medieval Europe.

The Papacy has influence over every bishop's election, over the major monastic orders and over every university. The Papacy's views on crusades and heresy can inspire hundreds of knights to battle. The Papacy's recent endorsement of mendicant friars has brought a new kind of preaching to many European cities.

The Papacy is not entirely a benign force. It is also a landholder with political ambitions and a constant need for money to pay for castles, soldiers and architects. It collects fines and fees from across Europe using the Templars as its bankers. It meddles in noble marriages and annulments to suit its political needs and desires. It favors its

ADISH BEST SERVED COLD

The Guelph-Ghibelline conflict is often just a convenient label for longstanding rivalries and vendettas. Feuds between nobles are common enough in Europe, but the Italian vendetta is something more potent. Italian noble families live next to each other in cities, not on separate rural baronies. They see each other in church and on the streets. Their vassals, clients and supporters encounter each other in marketplaces. Rivalries turn violent. When a noble or favored client is killed, a vendetta is declared until the death is avenged.

Vendettas can last for generations. A murdered man's great great-grandchild can satisfy the demands of honor by murdering a member of the killer's family 30 years after the original death. This murder, of course, causes a reprisal, so the cycle continues. Noble families ally with other families for mutual protection, drawing each other into webs of vendetta and alliance. It is no wonder that the merchants and artisans feel the need to protect themselves through the popolo and by trying to force the podestà to enforce order on the streets.

A noble-born Italian Cainite is likely to follow the vendetta tradition, although he may spend decades or centuries taking appropriate reprisals on mortal and vampiric foes. Cainites may also be drawn into mortal vendettas through their still-living family.

allies with grants of land and power. It blasts its rivals with denunciations of heresy and foul deeds.

The contradictions inherent in the Church come to a head in Italy in the Papacy and Rome.

The Pope

The pope is the bishop of Rome and the elected monarch of the Church. He is its guardian, its high priest and its intellectual leader. He is also sovereign of the Patrimony of Saint Peter, a loosely unified collection of territories in the center of Italy. He wears the Fisherman's Ring, the Double Crown, Saint Peter's Keys and the pallium. (He won't be considered infallible on matters of faith and morality until 1870, though.)

The pope's moods, politics, opinions and hobbies are the subject of endless speculation and gossip among clergy and the educated laity alike. Struggles between rival popes elected by divided groups of cardinals are a matter for deep spiritual crisis across Europe. Political disputes

with the papacy are dangerous for all involved—a secular lord risks excommunication, and the pope himself risks appearing too concerned with temporal matters.

The popes are men, although there are legends of a disguised female pope, Pope Joan, who reigned briefly in the ninth century and was discovered when she became pregnant by a cardinal. Popes are typically older men. (The cardinals were concerned about electing Innocent III at the tender age of 37.) Most popes are Italian, and of those, most are from Rome and the surrounding countryside. Popes are commonly monks, bishops or cardinals before their election.

The pope is elected for life. In 1230, the process of election by a two-thirds majority of the cardinals after a pope's death, and the ritual of presenting the new Pope to the Roman people, has been basically the same for nearly 200 years.


In 1230, Pope Gregory IX has just returned to Rome from Perugia. On Easter Sunday, 1228, he was attacked by a Ghibelline mob at the altar of Saint Peter's after Ghibellines publicly read Frederick II's response to Gregory's excommunication of him in 1227. Gregory fled the city for Viterbo, and then Perugia. He is called back by the city's sole senator after a disastrous flood convinced the Roman public to reconcile with the head of the Church.

The Cardinals

The cardinals are the most influential people in the Church after the pope. Cardinals are the pope's councilors, administrators and ambassadors. They serve as judges, investigators and examiners of candidates for sainthood. They have various ceremonial duties in and around Rome.

Like the pope, the cardinals are mostly old Italian men from Roman noble families who have spent their lives in the Church hierarchy. Their number varies greatly depending on the needs of the current pope. The pope appoints cardinals for life. Therefore, their college represents the favorites, politics and compromises of a series of dead pontiffs. Here, as elsewhere in Italy, there are various factions and camps.

The cardinals' best-known duty is to elect the pope. Papal elections are drawn-out affairs. Unless the cardinals try to postpone the decision by appointing a dying man (an uncertain solution as popes tend to live longer than expected), the process can be ghastly. An impatient Roman mob can try to force the cardinals into a decision by trapping the cardinals in the Lateran Palace and limiting their food to bread, water and wine. And if the Roman people do not approve of the candidate, a riot can ensue.



Cainites, like mortal nobles, try to influence the papal election through the cardinals and their advisors with occasional success. The cardinals are as likely as any other person to be motivated by family ties, personal friendships, rivalries, ambition, greed or fear.

The Curia

The pope is also head of a large bureaucracy full of officers, courts, administrators and clerks. Each one has its own rules, schedules and fees. In 1088, Urban II organized the bureaucracy into the curia. The curia is divided into several main sections: the chancery or writing-office, the chapel, the camera or financial office and the cardinals. Its courts handle cases of violent assaults on clerics and monks. It handles disputes among churches, and between churches and lay landholders over property rights and tithes. It handles requests by nobles for annulments. The curia is infamous for its inefficiency and its susceptibility to well-placed bribes.

The Papacy's finances are complex, and it is also developing a vast banking network through the Templars to maintain its finances. In 1228, the Papacy claimed one tenth of the income of every bishopric, monastery and parish priest to finance a war against Frederick II, in addition to various fees it received from bishoprics and monasteries for various documents and rights. Accounting for those sums of money requires vast record keeping. The pope is obliged to bestow gifts (*beneficia* and *presbyteria*) on the Roman populace, officials and clergy to ensure their support. Money is spent on art, on repairs and construction, on politics and on war.

Many Cainites try to cultivate allies and spies within the curia, contributing to its inefficiency and corruption. In general, they work through the lower ranks of the curia where their influence is less likely to come to the attention of reform-minded pontiffs.

Braving Rome, the City of a Thousand Churches

Relations between Cainites and the Papacy are complex. On the one hand, the curia is an immense source of power, wealth and influence. On the other, the Papacy embodies the faith of millions of believers. This faith makes it difficult for Cainites to approach, much less directly influence the pope and his closest advisors. Lasombra, Toreador, Setite and Ventrue factions work indirectly through the curia's lower ranks and through prelates' families. Tremere and Cappadocian scholars seek knowledge from the papal archives.

Adherents of the Cainite Heresy seek to influence doctrine. Penitential Cainites on the Road to Heaven often visit the various pilgrimage sites of Rome, getting as close as they dare to powerful relics.

Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) was one of the most powerful pontiffs. He was entirely free of supernatural influence and made strong strides to root out heresy, indirectly threatening many Cainites. Ventrue interested in papal matters assumed that Innocent III was acting under Lasombra suggestion and tried to identify and thwart suspected Lasombra pawns in the curia. Lasombra within the curia assumed Ventrue influence of Innocent's actions and took countermeasures. Their struggle increased some clergy's awareness of vampiric infiltration, leading to Innocent's championing of the Dominicans and Franciscans as new orders free from corruption.

Through Innocent's efforts, the upper ranks of the curia remain largely free of Cainite influence. Individual priests, bishops and even cardinals are willing or unwitting pawns of various factions, but none of the factions has been able (or willing) to put an end to the dangerous work of friar-inquisitors. At best, each of these factions is busy trying to steer the Inquisition away from their allies and distract them with rivals.

Patrimonium Sancti Petri

Central Italy has been claimed as the pope's domain for several centuries. Legend held that baptism by Pope Silvester cured Emperor Constantine of leprosy. In gratitude, Constantine gave the Church the western half of his empire and kept Byzantium for himself. Constantine's donation covered much of central and northern Italy. The papal archives include an eighth-century document that claims to be a copy of the original fourth-century donation. (Some Cainites familiar with the time say that Constantine made no such donation and that the document is a recently penned forgery.)

The pope's authority over his claimed lands has waxed and waned. In the eighth century, Stephen II asked the Franks (the ancestors of the French kings) to help him conquer and hold central Italy against a northern Italian kingdom. King Pippin came across the Alps, defeated the Lombards and gave the pope control over Ravenna and the duchy of Rome. This was the start of the Papal States. It was also the start of a strong link between the Papacy and outside armies that could help it defend its territories.

The Papal States' size fluctuated over the following centuries. In 1115, Countess Matilda of Tuscany,


CATHARS

The Cathars are active in Italy as well as in southern France. Those who abjure their heresy (see page 39 for a discussion of Cathar beliefs) after being captured are subject to perpetual imprisonment. Repentant Cathars are imprisoned in monasteries such as Monte Cassino and Cava where they cannot relapse. Those who refuse to recant are burned. Every person is obligated to report suspected heresy to their priest, bishop or a friar-inquisitor on pain of excommunication. Bodies of suspected heretics are exhumed and burnt as a vivid demonstration that the unrepentant heretic is damned and barred from holy ground.

Accusations and inquests are soon part of Italian inter-family quarrels, struggles between Guelphs and Ghibellines, and communal politics. Cities that have long struggled against their bishops are unwilling to simply comply with papal decrees against heretics. Some are sympathetic to the Cathars, others just oppose giving more power to the clergy. In many cities, Cathars are able to live and preach peacefully, and they offer shelter to their comrades in southern France.

Peter of Verona (canonized in 1253) is a noted Dominican friar-inquisitor in 1230. In 1234, Gregory IX appoints him Inquisitor of Northern Italy. Peter's parents were Cathars; he is all-too-familiar with their faith and their havens. He is also suspiciously well informed about Cainites. His unveiling of strongholds of the Cainite Heresy around Milan lead some Heretics to suspect that a traitor is in their midst. Peter is murdered by an assassin believed to be a Cathar in 1252, on a journey from Como to Milan. (The Cathar is framed. Peter recognizes the true assassin as a Lasombra priest of the Cainite Heresy.) The assassin first strikes him in the head with an axe. Peter rises to his knees to pray. Offering his blood as a sacrifice to God, he dips his fingers in it and writes on the ground the words: "Credo in Deum" (the first words of the Apostle's Creed). The murderer then pierces his heart. Peter's body is carried to Milan and laid in the church of Saint Eustorgio. The following year, he is canonized by Pope Innocent IV.





a strong supporter of the Papacy, died and left many of her lands to the pope. The popes and emperors argued over the exact borders of Matilda's lands, even while popes actively sought the emperor's military aid to pacify rebellious towns, drive out invaders and quell unrest. The southern border of the Papal States with Naples is particularly fluid. The Papacy claims that the kings of Sicily hold the southern lands as vassals of the pope. Frederick II (the current King of Sicily) seems to feel that the claim is weak at best.

Innocent III actively strengthened papal control over the Patrimony. The borders were confirmed in a bull issued in the name of the Empire in 1213 which listed the Papal States including all of Matilda's lands and the disputed lands along the Naples border. Frederick II has not contested the Papacy's claims in northern Italy, but has fought over the disputed Norman border. Tensions between Frederick II and the papacy are likely to result in further wars in the Papal States.

The Papal States are loosely governed by various papal appointees — *vicari* — and weak republics. The papal appointees are notorious for their corruption. Papal control varies with each individual pope, but the loyalty of the Papal States is weak at best.

Cainite princes are as active in the Patrimony as elsewhere in Italy. The Papacy is just another mortal landholder, whose appointees and agents can be ignored, influenced or dominated as needed when they interfere with Cainite affairs. The weakness of the Papacy makes unlife in the Patrimony dangerous, especially on the border with southern Italy. Wars over land, sieges and fires threaten Cainites domains and hunting grounds.

Universities

Cainite scholars can study at, or at least peruse the books of, Italian universities at Arezzo (founded 1213), Bologna (1088), Modena (1175), Naples (1224), Padua (1222), Salerno (ninth century) and Vincenzo (1204). Bologna and Salerno were the first permanent European organizations of scholars and students. Each started as guilds for scholars, similar to the existing guilds for wool makers and butchers. Most universities have a charter from the Papacy that allows graduates to teach anywhere in Christendom. Naples, chartered by Frederick II, is not recognized by the Papacy. Its graduates may teach only within Frederick's kingdom. Salerno is a noted medical school, but it is also not chartered by the Papacy.

The universities are among the few places where students from different cities and political factions can meet in relative safety, since the university and not the republic has the legal right to regulate and punish its students. Italian universities differ from those in France and England because the pope and curia are nearby and the bishops are relatively weak. Students are also protected (since 1158) by the Holy Roman Emperor, which decreed that scholars should be able to travel without harm or hindrance and that their professors or the bishop would have full rights to judge criminal or civil complaints against them. If a university is recognized by the Papacy, then the pope will support its masters against a podestà or republic.

Bologna's university specializes in law and has about 10,000 students. It is the oldest and most famous school of law in Europe. Many of its alumni have gone on to positions in the papal curia. A few have become cardinals and popes. The university, like other Italian organizations, is divided into two bodies: the *Università degli Ultramontani* (non-Italians) and the *Università dei Citramontani* (Italians), each with its own rector. It is further divided into various nations of students from distinct regions. The nations, like the popolo, are communal self-protection groups, in this case for students from outside the city who are otherwise at the mercy of local inn-keepers, tradesmen and mobs of other students. (This nation system developed at Bologna and was adopted by most other universities, including Paris.) The nations also elect councils to govern themselves, and rectors who (as a whole) set rules for the university. Although the student-rectors can make rules, hire and fire faculty, and set faculty salaries, only the faculty can decide whether a student is eligible for a degree.

In 1219, Honorius III gave the Archdeacon of Bologna exclusive authority to confer the doctorate on students in Bologna, thus making him the equivalent to the chancellor of Paris's university. (The doctorate was required to become a member of a faculty at any university.) Naples issues degrees that are valid for teaching only in Frederick's lands. Frederick is negotiating with the Papacy so that Naples may be recognized as a full university, able to issue degrees that are valid anywhere in Europe.

The 14 largest *Ultramontani* "nations" include England (divided into England and Aquitaine), France (divided into seven nations for different regions), the Holy Roman Empire, Hungary and Poland. The *Citramontani* nations are Roman (area around Rome), Tuscany (areas around Florence

and Siena, and around Ravenna and Venice) and Lombardy (areas around Genoa and Milan). Students also divide themselves between those studying the arts (*artisti*) and those studying other subjects (*guiristi*). The two groups live in separate parts of Bologna and often brawl.

The tensions between various nations and within the republic led students and faculty to leave Bologna to found the universities at Vincenza (founded 1204), Arezzo (1213) and Padua (1222). Although they are smaller and less prestigious than Bologna, each copied the basic organization of nations and university.

Cainite scholars often visit the universities to search for lost works and debate legal and philosophical questions. Although classes are held during the day, often in church buildings or courtyards, students are often up late into the night drinking, arguing and studying. Cainites can also seek out prominent mortal scholars and trade knowledge for services. Given the international draw of Italian universities, they are excellent hunting grounds for contacts, pawns and potential childer.

The Major City-States

Chronicles in Italy depend very much on the location. A Cainite's native city-state affects not just his social outlook and politics, but his very personality. A debate between three recently Embraced vampires from Florence, Siena and Venice should reveal stark differences in their views on power, class, obedience to a prince and respect for the clergy. Storytellers should emphasize the extreme civic pride of the republics, their violent factional politics, and their class divisions. A newly Embraced Cainite from the popolo of Bologna may have trouble obeying a dictatorial prince in Milan who was Embraced when the Lombard kings ruled northern Italy. A newly Embraced Cainite from Milan, on the other hand, may find the rough-and-tumble chaos of Florence's rival princes deeply troubling.

Rulers are given for cities where the ruler serves more than a short term as *podestà*.

Ancona

Ancona is a maritime republic and rival to Venice along the Adriatic coast of Italy within the Papal States. The city fought several wars with Venice in 1168 and 1173, and does so again later this century.

Local Cainites are amused that Ancona's cathedral, *Duomo San Ciriaco*, is built over a Temple to Venus. Walkers on the Road of Sin delight in trying

to tempt the cathedral chapter to licentious depravity and spreading rumors of a Curse of Venus which tempts clergy into shocking acts of carnality.

Assisi

Assisi is the birthplace of Saint Francis, founder of the Franciscan Order. It is a rival of its neighbor Perugia. The city was besieged and destroyed by Charlemagne in AD 773. Charlemagne then rebuilt the city and repopulated it with locals loyal to him. The cathedral, *Duomo San Rufino*, is the third built on the site. Legend says that it is built over the grave of the Roman goddess Ceres, killed here in the fourth century. This legend has some truth to it. The church is built over the tomb of the Gangrel Methuselah Opoin, who was staked by Saint Rufino and left imprisoned. At present, no other Cainite knows what happened to Opoin. Her tomb is extremely well protected by solid stone, ancient holy relics and what might be early thaumaturgic wards.

Construction on the basilica to Saint Francis, *San Francesco*, began shortly after his canonization in 1228. Franciscans are divided over whether their founder would approve of the vast memorial. One of Francis's followers, Elias (see sidebar), is supervising its construction in 1230. The basilica will be finished and consecrated in 1253.

The rapid growth of the Franciscan order and the growing crowds of pilgrims have made Assisi uncomfortable for many Cainites. *Maiarado d'Assisi*, a *Nosferatu* ashen priest on the Road of Heaven, protects Saint Francis's basilica and his remains from relic hunters and Cainites who would defile Francis's memory. He aided a group of mortal friars in hiding Francis's remains deep under the basilica to protect them from theft or desecration. The friars subsequently forgot the exact location of the remains. (The relics will not found until 1818.)

The basilica's treasury contains the "Veil of the most Holy Virgin," which can only be shown to the public in the presence of Assisi's bishop.

Bologna

Bologna is an old Etruscan city which was conquered by the Gauls and later the Romans. It was the capital of the Lombard kingdom in 711. It is significant for its university. The city has had a *podestà* since 1153, and it has three councils.

Currently, unrest between the republic and its bishop (who holds 10 castles in the *condato*) roils in the city. In fact, the city revolts against the bishop in 1231-33 and seizes three of the bishop's castles.



The city is placed under interdict by Gregory IX and the university closed until it reaches a truce with the bishop in 1233. Despite this current tension, the city is Guelph in its sympathies and opposes Frederick II. There is also unrest between the city and its podestàs. In 1195, one podestà had his teeth forcibly extracted by a group of nobles who were angry about a fine he'd imposed on them. In 1231, another podestà is attacked by a mob, which destroys part of the podestà's palace and record halls after a dispute with a powerful local merchant. In 1269, another mob sets fire to the podestà's palace because he refuses to grant bail to a guild master accused of a crime.

Rumor has it that Bologna's oldest church, Saints Peter and Paul, holds the true tomb of Saint Peter. The Papacy is not amused with this rumor, and it has threatened to close the church if it does not deny the rumor. Bologna's cathedral, San Pietro, was rebuilt in 1161 after being destroyed in a fire and more recently was damaged in a 1222 earthquake. Repairs are underway in 1230.

The city is also home to two Dominican monasteries — Santa Maria della Purificazione, founded by Saint Dominic in 1218, and San Niccolò delle Vigne, where Saint Dominic died in 1221. Fabrizio Ulfila, the Aryan bishop-turned-Ventruie, who will be the decisive Cainite power behind the Spanish Inquisition one night, has been in Bologna since Dominic's death. Fabrizio dwells near the university and hunts for promising pawns, ghouls and childer among the students. He is especially interested in Dominicans. Fabrizio also opposes other clans' efforts to influence the clergy through Bologna's students. He intermittently dabbles in mortal politics as a Guelph supporter but is primarily interested in the Dominican order over the long term.

Florence

Thirteenth-century histories say that Florence was founded in a field called *chiés Mars* after the Roman god of war. Several suggest that, this being so, it is no wonder that Florence is often plagued with war and civil discord. Florence is a traditional rival of Pisa (which controls its access to the sea) and Siena.

Florence was the seat of the Marquess of Tuscany in the 11th and 12th century. It is part of the lands that Countess Matilda of Tuscany gave to the Papacy when she died, which are disputed between the Papacy and the Empire. Florence is traditionally a Guelph city, but it has a strong Ghibelline faction that intermittently seizes control or is in exile. Florence's Guelph-Ghibelline conflict started in 1216 after a scion of a Guelph family was murdered by a youth of a Ghibelline family in a

SAINT FRANCIS, SAINT CLAIRE AND ELIAS

Francis Bernardone was born in 1182 to a wealthy draper's family. He served as a soldier in one of Assisi's wars against Perugia and was a captive there.

In 1202, he saw visions of the Virgin and Christ during an illness. He gave up his wealth, donned rags, and began to beg and preach. In 1210, he wrote his rule for the Order of Minors, mendicant monks, later known as Franciscans. In 1224, he received the stigmata — oozing wounds on his hands and feet similar to those Christ received at the crucifixion. Francis died in the valley below Assisi in 1226. He was canonized in 1228 in an elaborate ceremony.

Francis's contemporary, Chiara Sciffi (Saint Claire), was born the eldest daughter of the Count of Sasso-Rosso in 1194. She heard Francis preaching in Assisi in 1212, fled her noble family and became a nun. She stayed with Benedictine nuns for a year, where her father tried first to persuade her to return, and then to kidnap her. Her sister Agnes, who also fled their family, joined her in the convent.

Francis helped Claire and Agnes settle at San Damiano in 1215, where she founded the Order of Poor Ladies (Poor Clares). Her followers live in strict enclosure from the public, and they subsist by begging in the enclosure, helped by attendant Friars-Minor (Franciscans). The Poor Ladies' rule was approved by Honorius III in 1219, and it is very similar to that of the Benedictine nuns. The rule was modified by Gregory IX in 1228 to allow the order to live in communal poverty. (The order's close association with the Franciscans ends in 1267 when the papacy becomes the order's patron.) Claire dies in 1253 and is canonized by Alexander IV in 1255. Her body, like that of Saint Francis, is hidden in 1260, and it is not found until 1850.

Elias, one of Francis's earliest followers, was named Vicar-General of the Order of Minors by Saint Francis in 1221. When Francis died, Elias took over both the order's spiritual and administrative leadership. He was deposed as Vicar-General in 1227 because of disputes over his fund-raising for

Saint Francis's basilica. He then made the basilica his full-time project. Various Franciscan factions oppose him as he tends toward a wealthy lifestyle with fine clothes, well-dressed servants and skilled cooks. There are rumors that he is Ghibelline, sympathetic to Frederick II, and that he dabbles in alchemy. (Elias is deposed in 1239 by Gregory IX after a long-running political dispute over his wealth and the goals of the order. He will, in fact, join Frederick II in 1240 and be excommunicated by Gregory IX for his faithlessness. Elias serves as Frederick's ambassador to Constantinople and Cyprus, and he builds a Franciscan church and convent in Cortona. He dies in 1253, reconciled with the Church but not with the Franciscans, who disinter his body from the Cortona church and discard his bones.)

The Franciscan order is a perplexing new development to many Cainites. There have always been popular preachers, often barefoot and poor, who wander about preaching against wealth and power. Before the Franciscans and the Dominicans, most would-be reformers were either branded heretics by the local bishops or were destroyed by disillusioned followers when they eventually failed to measure up to their own preaching. The Franciscans and the Dominicans are recognized by the Papacy and independent of the local bishops.

Cainites understand the strict rules of the Dominicans. Many will seek to turn the friar-inquisitors to their own ends, or at least steer them toward their rivals. The Franciscans' emphasis on humility is more perplexing. Some Cainites see stories of Saint Francis taming the wolf as a metaphor for divine forgiveness for vampires. Others perceive the Franciscans as wandering papal spies who stir up unrest among mortals.

The Franciscan order's struggle between Francis's ideals of humility and poverty and its growing popularity and wealth from benefactors' donations may also attract Cainites who wish to preserve the order, pervert it, or merely bend it to their ends.

marital dispute. The feud quickly drew in both families' political supporters and turned into a struggle between the city's two political factions.

Florence is governed by a Council of the Commune. It is divided into four *quartieri*, each in turn divided into four wards. The busiest parts of the city are the area around the Ponte Vecchio (a bridge over the Arno river), the Orsanmichele (grain market) and the

Mercato Vecchi (Old Market). Construction on the Franciscan church of Santa Croce began in 1228.

The heart of Florence's economy is the woolen cloth industry. Merchant factors buy the finest fleeces from England and Flanders at the Champagne Fairs and ship them to the city. The wool is prepared in several steps. The workers are paid at a piece-work rate for each task. The wool thread is woven into

cloth, dyed and sold across Europe. The Lana guild has jurisdiction over the entire cloth industry. Its members are limited to the *lanaiuoli* — the wealthiest merchants and mill owners — subcontractors and salaried workers are excluded.

Cainite Florence remains divided between two rival princes — Anicius the Golden and Panfilo the Cruel. Anicius is allied with the Guelph party and with Bandecca Manelli of Clan Brujah, the patron of the popolo. Panfilo is allied with the Ghibellines. Visitors to the city may easily be drawn into the conflict. It is difficult to properly greet both princes without rousing the ire of either. The running struggle between Anicius and Panfilo has driven many Cainites from the city, leading to a lower number than the population would support. Some Cainites visit Florence, either for personal reasons or to lend support to one of the contenders, but most Cainites prudently wait for the city's politics to settle.

Future Fates

Florence is a leader in the struggle against Frederick II and his successors. The city's Ghibellines are exiled in 1258. That order will tip the balance between Anicius and Panfilo by exiling many of Panfilo's mortal allies and ghouls. Panfilo himself refuses to leave the city, and he dies at the hands of Anicius, who leaves him staked and tied to the Roman Statue of Mars at the foot of the Ponte Vecchio to greet the sun.

Genoa

Genoa lies on the Ligurian coast at the base of rugged cliffs. The rivers that surround Genoa are not navigable, and they are unreliable sources for water-powered mills. It has a small hinterland with poor soil. Trade can reach the upper Po valley through a pass (1,548 feet) and the old Roman Via Postumia. For the most part, Genoa depends on grain imports from Sicily and other ports.

The Muslims sacked Genoa in AD 934-35. The city rebuilt and became an independent republic. In 1098, Genoese ships transported the First Crusade to Outremer. The Genoese were rewarded with the bones of Saint John the Baptist. Genoa also received the right to create its own community in Antioch. Genoa received other important trading rights and tax immunities throughout the Crusades. King Baldwin I of Jerusalem confirmed its rights in an 1104 charter.

The Genoese republic was created in 1099. Before that, the city was ruled by its bishop, local nobility and perhaps important merchants. Genoa's consuls were chosen by the *campagna*, a self-selected group of Genoese merchants. Genoa's guilds were fairly weak.

In 1190, the city leaders replaced the republic with a podestà and a committee of eight rectors in hopes of settling continuing unrest.

Genoa is a traditional ally of the Greek emperors of Byzantium. It supported the exiled Greeks even more strongly after Venice expelled many Genoese merchants from Constantinople and major colonies in the wake of the Fourth Crusade. It is a traditional rival of Pisa, with whom it intermittently fought a war between 1162 and 1175.

Genoa, like Marseilles, has an unsavory reputation because of the Children's Crusade. In Marseilles, many of the naïve young pilgrims were sold into Egyptian slavery (or worse) by unscrupulous merchants. In Genoa, some of the pilgrims were sold into slavery. Some became laborers and child-prostitutes, food or toys for Genoese Cainites. Only a few pilgrims went on from Genoa to Rome.

At present, the city is dealing with the aftermath of a failed coup in 1227 and with unrest among the various villages of its coastal *condato*.

Genoa has trading colonies in Outremer, primarily in Acre and Tyre. The colonies are walled districts, with their own churches, butcher shops, baking ovens and warehouses, which are legally under Genoese law. When the Genoese helped capture a city, they were usually awarded a third of its area, tax exemptions and administrative and judicial autonomy. For example, Genoa has a square in Antioch with 30 houses, a warehouse, a well, its own church and perpetual exemption from taxes. They held a section in Jerusalem, a street in Jaffa and a third each of the area and customs revenues of Acre, Arsuf and Caesarea. Many of these colonies have been lost as the Muslims re-conquer parts of Outremer.

Cainite Genoa is best known for the Ravnos pirates who travel among Genoese freebooters in the Mediterranean. Lately, these freebooters have been plundering Venetian ships and colonies, in a loose alliance with Byzantine Cainites. The city's Cainites answer to a closed circle of Cainite elders, mostly Lasombra from the d'Agostino family. These elders tolerate only a small number of childer and ghouls. Cainite crusaders and merchants are welcome as long as they do not cause trouble and do not stay overlong. Childer are encouraged to emigrate to Genoese colonies in Outremer or help quell the Lupine "infestations" in Corsica and Sardinia.

Corsica

Corsica is a mountainous island. Most settlements are along the coast. Genoa took control of Corsica in 1121, when it bribed Pope Calixtus II to revoke the

Pisan archbishop's right to consecrate the Corsican bishops. Calixtus II issued a papal bull confirming the Genoese right in April 1123. The Papacy awarded Corsica to Genoa as a papal fief in 1133.

Corsica is home to a few Gangrel and a number of Lupines in its mountainous interior. The coastal settlements are too small to support more than one or two Cainites on a permanent basis.

Sardinia

Sardinia, like Corsica, is a mountainous island. It has many ruins of prior settlements including several thousand *nuraghi* (fortified towers) dating from the second millennium BC. It has been settled by the Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Byzantines and Muslims. The Gangrel in the interior Embraced childer from all of its invaders, while fighting to keep various other Cainites confined to the coasts. Sardinian Gangrel and the local Lupines both want to drive invading Cainites out of the island, but are not allied. At best, they attack invaders in preference to each other. Unfortunately, silver mines in the southwest of the island keep drawing fresh invaders into Sardinia faster than the Gangrel and Lupines can keep them out. The Lupines avoid the silver mines, but patrol the areas around them, making sure that no vampire gets near these resources.

Milan

Milania seems an odd site for a city. It is in the open on the Po plain, without any natural defense or even access to a navigable river. It is, however, convenient to several Alpine passes. It has been the seat of emperors (fourth century), kings (10th century) and bishops who rivaled Rome in power (11th century). In recent years, it has declined to merely a large city-state. It is a center for making weapons and armor, with some of the finest weapons-smiths in Europe providing arms for the empire, crusaders and the city-states.

Emperor Conrad II gave the city its charter in 1055. The city intermittently struggles with its powerful bishop over governance, territories in the *condato* and the election of new bishops. Milan fought against Frederick I Barbarossa. It was forced to surrender in March 1162, was burned to the ground, and its lands were salted. Undaunted, Milan led the formation of the Lombard league in 1167 and its revival in 1226.

Since Milan's nobles are mostly Ghibelline and sympathetic to Frederick II, the city's government, the *Credenza di San Ambrogio* (composed of 12 members

representative of the three orders of citizens), and the General Council are considering the creation of a Captain of the Popolo who will represent their Guelph sympathies. (They do so in 1240, much to the nobles' displeasure.)

Many of Milan's Ventrue Cainite elders were killed in the fire of 1162. The remainder, mostly Germanic Ventrue Embraced during the Lombard era, have tried to preserve their traditional authority. Cainites Embraced since the republic are restless and open to Lasombra promises of greater autonomy under a Lasombra prince. Should another fire, military defeat or riot present an opportunity, it is likely that Milan's childer will revolt and try to take over the city. Whether Lasombra promises can be trusted is another question entirely.

Pisa

Pisa, a former Etruscan city, has been an independent republic since 888. It is a rival of Genoa, Florence and Venice, and it is strongly Ghibelline in politics. The city is at the confluence of the Arno and Serchio rivers, seven miles from the ocean, and, on average, only 12 feet above sea level. The region around Pisa is very swampy, and malaria is common in the spring and summer.

Pisa controls Elba island and its important iron mines. It lost control of Corsica to Genoa in 1121. It captured Sardinia in 1015, but lost control of the island to Genoa in 1164. After a war with Genoa (1162-1175), the cities agreed to share Sardinia. Pisa conquered the Muslim-controlled Balearic Islands in 1113. When the Muslims recaptured the islands, Pisa financed Spanish raiders to harry the Muslims. When King Jaime I "the Conqueror" of Aragon captured the islands in 1229, Pisa established trading colonies on the islands.

Pisa is hopeful about the future in 1230. Frederick II has just returned from successful negotiations in Outremer. Pisa hopes that its trade with the Crusader States and with Muslim North Africa will improve. (Instead, Pisa's fortunes decline rapidly after a series of wars with Genoa in the 1270s, which end with its defeat at the battle of Meloria in 1284 and the loss of Elba and its share of Sardinia.)

The famed Leaning Tower (*Torre Pendente*) has been under construction since 1173, and "leaning" since 1178. Nearby is a cemetery which contains earth brought back from Golgotha (the site of the Crucifixion) by a group of crusaders in 1203 at the request of Bishop Ubaldo Lanfranchi. The earth, which is said to reduce bodies to skeletons in a few days, is used to bury Pisa's most important citizens.

Pisa has a large body of Cainites involved in its politics. The elders are divided about which of the rival claimants to Florence to back, if either. When an Assamite assassin was killed in Florence in 1205, both factions in Pisa blamed the other for smuggling him from North Africa. There are other rumors that the city's Nosferatu have allied with the Followers of Set, perhaps to settle the Florence issue.

Ravenna

Ruler: Paolo Travestari

Ravenna is a city of considerable historical and strategic importance. Like Venice, it is a city of islands and canals. It was once capital of the Roman Empire, and later an exarchate of Byzantium. From AD 752, however, Ravenna and the exarchate were governed in the name of the pope by the archbishop, assisted by three tribunes, who were elected by the people. The archbishops and the city were strongly allied to the empire. In 1198 Ravenna joined a league of cities against the empire. Innocent II was able to enforce the Papacy's rights over the city and have those rights ratified by Emperor Otto IV and Frederick II.

Ravenna commands the passes across the Apennines from the Po plain to Rome, making it critically important to the Papacy and the empire. Venice is also interested in Ravenna, primarily to prevent its expansion as a rival. At present, the Traversari family controls it. Paolo Traversari has been podestà since 1226.

Ravenna's bishops have several extraordinary privileges, including some unique in the Church. The bishop is confirmed and consecrated by the pope directly. In religious ceremonies, the bishop sits immediately behind or at the right hand of the pope.

For centuries, Ravenna's Cainites were controlled by a coterie of four Cainites: the Greek Ventrue Aristophokles; Lucius Cornelius Scipio, a Promethean Brujah; Lucius's Cappadocian lover, Penelope; and the Lasombra sage Ngalo Umbeke. After the Lombards captured the city in 752, Livia da Ravenna diablerized her sire, Aristophokles, and took his seat on the coterie. She is *de facto* Prince of Ravenna and patron to Ezzelino III da Romano (see page 100). (Rumors circulate that she is also negotiating with the Greeks to oust the Venetians and Franks from Constantinople.) Lucius and Penelope have moved to Hamburg in the Holy Roman Empire. Ngalo was most recently seen in Sicily at Frederick II's court.

All told, the Prince of Ravenna is in a strong position to aid Frederick II. Whether she chooses to do so and become stronger than the pro-Guelph princes of northern Italy is a different matter.

Rome

If one asked a peasant working in the fields of Gloucestershire or Poitiers to describe Rome, said peasant might imagine it to be a place of unearthly beauty and holiness. The ideal of Rome is an image spread throughout Christendom. The reality is a bit more complex.

Rome is the seat of the Papacy, home to numerous saints' tombs and holy relics. It is the resting place of Saints Peter and Paul. The city boasts over 300 churches, ranging from tiny chapels to the pope's residence at the Lateran Palace. So many pilgrims crowd the major churches that they risk being crushed or trampled. Innkeepers, it is said, threaten wayfarers already settled at one inn to come and lodge in their own establishments.

It is a city of expensive lodgings, lawsuits and thinly disguised simony. Letters to and from Rome are preoccupied with the problems of purchase and bribery. Sometime it is wise to pretend to wealth, sometimes to poverty. Saint Bernard of Clairvaux denounced Roman greed a century ago. Little has changed.

Rome is a city infamous for its marshes and "foul vapors" (malaria) that kill many Romans and visitors each summer. It is known for its seven hills, which provide some shelter from the Tiber's frequent floods. (The same seven hills are not always named, but the number is more important than the geography.) In 1230, the Tiber floods, leaving many residents homeless. The Romans take this as a sign that they offended God by offending Pope Gregory IX, and they are trying to make amends.

It is a city of ruins — many of which are used as residences or fortresses, and pillaged for building materials. Prominent Roman families fortify themselves in the Colosseum as if it were a cliff full of caves. So long as the Colosseum stands, Romans say, Rome will stand, and with it the world. When a series of earthquakes rocked Rome in 1229 and loosened some stones from the Colosseum, Romans were horrified. An abbot of Cassino ordered a series of barefoot processions to ward off further misfortune.

The Roman Senate was revived in 1143 to govern the city separately from the Papacy. (The Roman public had rebelled after a failed attempt to capture two neighboring cities.) Senators serve a one-year term. Their number can vary from one to fifty-six. The city is divided into 13 *rioni* (districts), whose boundaries are vague.

The city is full of pilgrims and those who provide services to them, from physicians to prostitutes. It is also busy with the papal curia and its associated

servants and functionaries — who have their own providers and procurers. Notaries, scribes and physicians are especially common.

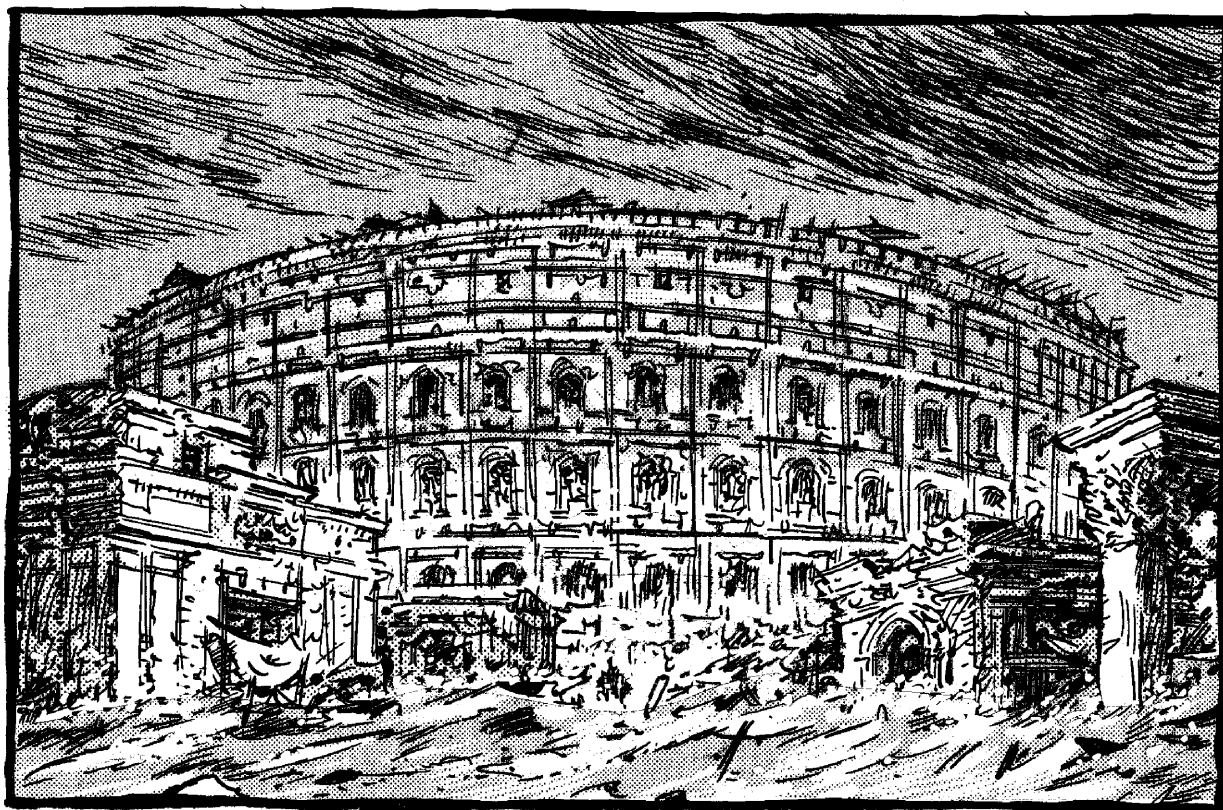
Rome's major guild is the *Ars Bobacteriorum* (Guild of Stockbreeders). Guild members are often involved in the city's offices. It has an organization of cloth merchants, but cloth is not a major product of the city. There are also various minor guilds.

The Church of Santa Maria in Sassia and the hospital of Santo Spirito are both important institutions. Santo Spirito was founded by Innocent III to care for abandoned orphans and "sinful" women. Pregnant pilgrims in labor are usually brought to Santo Spirito for the birth, and female Cainites are sometimes sheltered discretely among its guests. Innocent III arranged a yearly display of the *Veronica* (a towel onto which Christ had imprinted his features on way to his crucifixion) by the canons of Saint Peter on the first Sunday after the Epiphany. Clergy and guests who avoided the ceremony or seemed reluctant to approach the relic where examined for heresy. Within a few years, the hospital was freed of direct Cainite presence. The pope himself and his cardinals celebrate a Mass at the Santa Spirito, and indulgences (forgiveness for sins) are granted to those present.

For pilgrims mortal and otherwise, Rome boasts seven major pilgrimage churches. San Giovanni in

Laterano (the Lateran) contains the Scala Sancta (the staircase of Pilate's palace marked with Christ's blood), the *Acheiropoeton* (an icon of Christ started by Saint Luke and finished by an angel), the heads of Saints Peter and Paul and the foreskin of Christ. San Paolo Fuori le Mura is the site of Saint Paul's tomb. San Pietro, the site of Saint Peter's martyrdom, contains the *Veronica*. Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, contains a piece of the Cross discovered by Saint Helen when she visited Jerusalem and the angelically severed chains used to bind Saint Peter. Santa Maria Maggiore (also known as Santa Maria delle Neve and Santa Maria del Presepe), boasts a piece of Christ's crib. San Lorenzo Fuori le Mura and San Sebastiano are the final two pilgrimages churches, both of which boast less impressive relics. Pilgrims seeking indulgences are encouraged to visit the four major churches (San Pietro, San Paolo, Santa Maria and San Giovanni) once a day for 15 days. They are encouraged to visit the three other major churches once a day for seven days. Certain prayers are required at each church, although the penitent may add others.

Rome attracts a large number of Cainites. Some come seeking penance or to restore their faith. Others come to prey on the pilgrims. Some are attracted to the Papacy and the curia, although it has become harder for Cainites and their followers to pass un-



detected since Innocent III's reign. Scion Cainites often come to Rome hoping to gain power within the Church. Cainites, both faithful and heretical, are interested in influencing Church doctrine. Scholarly Cainites are interested in ancient texts in the Lateran archives. (The pope and the cardinals will not live in the Vatican until after 1377.)

Many Cainites do not survive Rome. The city is filled with relics and churches, some of which destroy Cainites who come too close. The most powerful churches, such as San Pietro, San Paolo, Santa Maria and San Giovanni, and the most powerful relics can suppress a Cainite's or ghouls' powers, cause physical burns and scars or even reduce Cainite to ash on contact.

Visiting Cainites can easily find themselves caught in the war in the catacombs between the Nosferatu and Cappadocians. Or they may become caught in machinations between the factions trying to influence the curia or the mortal city. Roman politics are played for high stakes and tend to be deadly for pawns. Visitors are well advised to seek out Cato, a Nosferatu ghoul who frequents the city's inns for pilgrims, and pay him generously for his advice on current factions and feuds.

In addition to the numerous priests and clerics living, working and visiting the city, Dominican and Franciscan friars wander the streets. An increasing number of them are veteran inquisitors and very apt at spotting and destroying supernatural creatures. At best, the friars keep an eye on pilgrims, making hunting difficult.

Even the extensive catacombs are not safe. Two factions of Nosferatu and one of Cappadocians have a three-way standoff in the underground. At the time Rome fell, the Cappadocians were the masters of the catacombs and protectors of the graves, burial gifts and altars. Some Nosferatu existed peacefully among the Cappadocians. During the chaos surrounding Rome's fall about four centuries ago, some Nosferatu plundered the graves. The Cappadocians universally condemned the clan and tried to drive all Nosferatu from the catacombs. One faction of Nosferatu, then allied with Rome's prince, held its ground. A second, more recent faction of Nosferatu has entered the tunnels and vies with the other two for control. The catacombs extend for miles — it is easy for a Cainite to become lost in the twisting, often unstable passages, and it is impossible for any single faction to maintain control.

Most recently, the earthquake of Good Friday, 1229, collapsed Prince Constantius's home just after dawn. As neighbors cleared the rubble looking for sur-

RELICS

Relics and their legends are rife in Rome. The city is rich with physical tokens of Christ's life and death. The modern reader may well balk at the likelihood of so many surviving tangible fragments of the past, but the medieval mind was very much willing to accept it. The modern Church is a bit more skeptical about some claims, but it affirms the authenticity of the Church's greatest relics. It is up to the Storyteller to decide whether relics gain power from their authenticity, or from the passionate beliefs of the faithful who flock to venerate them.

vivors, they exposed Constantius to the bright morning sun. The rescuers quickly turned into a mob that killed everyone in the house, tore open every container and cellar, and looted the remains. Peter of Verona (see page 106), a prominent Dominican preacher visiting Rome, came upon the scene and swiftly organized a search of every warehouse and building known to be owned by the house's mortal residents. A dozen Cainites, a score ghouls, along with about 100 workers, servants and family members, were burned by the mob that day. (The story grows dramatically with the distance from Rome. An English Cainite might hear rumor of 50 or more vampires killed by Templar knights after a brutal battle in the Roman streets.) Gregory IX appointed Peter as Inquisitor of Rome to secure the curia and the city from heretics. (Gregory IX is so satisfied with Peter's work that he appoints him Inquisitor of Northern Italy in 1234.)

At present, Rome has no recognized prince. The feuding Nosferatu and Cappadocians in the catacombs each claim the right to approve the next claimant. Rumors state that Nosferatu tunneling weakened Constantius's home, causing its collapse. Many elder Lasombra wish to claim Rome, but are hesitant to risk Constantius's fate.

Siena

Siena is the second most wealthy city in Tuscany. Legend has it that Siena was founded by Senio and Ascanio, twin sons of Remus, the brother of Romulus, founder of Rome. The twins fled Rome, taking with them a statue of the she-wolf, the symbol of Rome.

Siena is built on the ridges of three hills, it depends entirely on overland trade along the old Roman roads between Rome and the Po Valley. The city does not have a navigable river or a steady supply of water.

Siena encourages trade by maintaining inns and hospices for merchants and by actively patrolling its roads. However, Siena's grain needs are so dire that the republic automatically grants a five day safe-conduct to any outlaw who comes to the city bringing reasonable amounts of grain for sale. Siena is predominantly Ghibelline and a traditional rival to Florence.

Siena is also famous for the *palio*, a horse race between the 17 *contrade* (neighborhoods) in honor of the Virgin, which has been held every year since the 11th century. The festival preparations start in April, leading up to two bareback horse races around the Piazza del Campo held on July 2 (in honor of the local Madonna of Provenzano) and August 16 (in honor of the Assumption of the Virgin). Because only 10 horses compete in each race due to space, complex intrigues surround which riders are chosen and which excluded. Sienese mortals and vampires both get involved in the betting, bribing, sabotage and spying that surrounds the race, although use of Disciplines to influence the actual outcome of the race is considered highly uncouth and is grounds for expulsion from the city.

Siena is currently involved in a minor war with Florence. It has hired over 700 mercenary crossbowmen from across northern Italy to aid it, an effort that nearly bankrupted the republic. (Permanent mercenary companies lead by *condottieri* are still a half-century in the future.) This year Florence briefly sieges the city. Unable to breach the walls, it catapults manure and dead mules into the city in hopes of starting disease. The war lasts only another year, ending in a stalemate.

Siena's unlife is dangerous. An ongoing three-way power struggle between the current prince, Henricus Germanus, two Lasombra elders based in the countryside, and a group of Tremere interested in a rumored magical river beneath the city dominates Siena's nights. Visitors to the city are pressured to side with one faction or the other in hopes of tipping the power balance.

Venice

Ruler: Doge Giacomo Tiepolo (1229-1249)

Venice is an extremely wealthy and powerful city in 1230. Its trading empire extends across the Mediterranean and includes virtual control of Constantinople itself. The city itself is surprisingly small — a group of islands surrounded by a large lagoon. The city controls the barrier islands of the lagoon, and some of the surrounding countryside, but its mainland Italian territory is small compared with its rivals.

Venice remains neutral in the upcoming struggle between the Lombard League and Frederick II. Since

the capture of Constantinople in 1204, Venice has been busy with its new overseas colonies. Many relics have been brought back to Venice from Constantinople. Among the art treasures seized by the Venetians were the four graceful bronze horses that now stand above the portal of the Basilica of San Marco at Venice, and the vast quantity of jewels and semi-precious stones that adorn the Basilica's *pala d'oro* (a seven-by-11-foot altar screen).

Doge Giacomo Tiepolo had been Duke of Crete and later podestà of Constantinople before becoming doge. The electors tied, and he was chosen by lot. (Thereafter, the electors were increased from 40 to 41 to avoid another tie.) He is familiar with Venice's overseas colonies and with the weakness of the Crusader kingdoms.

The Venetians have a deep suspicion of powerful families and political parties. Eleven men, including one from each district (*sestieri*), nominate the 41 electors for the doge. In addition to the doge, Venice has a Council of Sages, a Great Council and a Lesser Council. Most of the councilors are chosen from about 30 families.

The city is a collection of islands, divided by canals and linked by bridges. Visitors enter Venice by boat from the mainland or by ship into the port. The most famous sites in the city are the doge's palace, Plaza of San Marco, the Basilica of San Marco and the commercial center around the Rialto bridge. The most impressive buildings line the Grand Canal, a wide waterway that divides the city and is crossed by the Rialto bridge. To the east is the Arsenal, the republic's shipyard that builds and maintains Venice's fleet of galleys and merchant ships.

Venice's glassworks are mostly on the island of Murano, in the lagoon, to avoid fire in the city itself. Many of the glassmakers are immigrants from Constantinople, who are given tax benefits to stay and threatened with death if they leave. The Franciscans have a monastery (founded in 1224) on the Island of the Two Vines, also in the lagoon. The Benedictines have monasteries on San Lazzaro and on Torcello. The city's cemetery is on San Michele in Isola, and it is a refuge for the city's Nosferatu and Cappadocians.

Venice is a major hub of Cainite politics. Prince Guilelmo Aliprando holds the city as successor to Narses, Prince of Venice and Archbishop of Nod, whom Guilelmo destroyed in 1215. (For more details, see **Bitter Crusade**.) Among Prince Guilelmo's many concerns is a rivalry with Bishop Alfonzo of Venice, Prince of Constantinople and Guilelmo's rival for control of Venice's colonies in the eastern Mediterranean. Both Guilelmo and Alfonzo worry about schemes by Natalya Svyatoslav and Anna Comnena (see Chapter

Eight) to restore Greek control of Constantinople. Guilelmo is also a sincere adherent of the Cainite Heresy and active in promoting and protecting it.

Venice is also home to the Giovanni family, a cabal of mortal necromancer/merchants with whom the Cappadocians have been involved for about two centuries. Cappadocius himself granted Augustus Giovanni the Embrace in 1005. Ignazio Giovanni is Augustus's right hand and childe and liaison to Guilelmo. The Giovanni family is wealthy and powerful. Members of the family, mortal and ghoul alike, can be found in several northern Italian republics as merchants, diplomats, mercenaries and bureaucrats. Embraced Giovanni are rare at this point.

Venetian Colonies

Venice has always had trade colonies in the Mediterranean and Adriatic. Constantinople's fall in 1204 lets Venice take colonies along the Aegean and Greek mainland. It monopolizes trade through the Bosphorus to the Black Sea. Genoa and Pisa have both lost trade and colonies. Many of their captains engage in piracy and raids while the republics contemplate revenge. Important lesser colonies include Corfu, the Cyclades islands a number of cities on the Dalmatian coast. Crete, Modon and Negroponte are critically important to the republic.

All of the colonies are battlegrounds between Venetian Cainites sent by Prince Guilelmo to protect and pacify the colonies, local Cainites of various clans who resent Venetian immigration, Genoese Ravnos freebooters and Greek Cainites trying to weaken Venetian and crusader control of Constantinople.

Crete

Constantinople sold the island of Crete to Venice in 1204. Venice appoints a doge every two years. The doge, who resides in Herakleion, is assisted by a council, whose members are also appointed every two years. Venice also sent a general to see to the island's defense, which thus far hasn't stopped Genoese freebooters from raiding the island.

Venice actively encourages immigration to Crete. A sixth of the island was allotted to each of the six districts (*sestieri*) of the city. Several hundred prominent families have already moved to Crete and set up estates. More are expected to follow.

The local population is not pleased with the Venetian immigrants. Rebellions broke out in 1212 and in 1217. In 1230, three local noble families, the Skordylides, Melissenis and Drakontopoulis, start a rebellion that lasts for six years. Venice is forced to concede a great deal of land and remove several garrisons as part

of the peace treaty. Rebellion continues to simmer, but Venice's control of the island remains secure.

Augustus Giovanni recently volunteered the services of himself and his family to help secure Crete for Prince Guilelmo against Bishop Alfonzo and Ravnos Genoese raiders. Guilelmo was gratified at the support, although concerned about letting the powerful "new-comers" range too far from his sight. He has insisted that either Augustus or Ignazio must be in Venice at all times, in effect, as hostage for the other.

Modon (Methoni)

"The eye of the Republic" and "the receptacle and special nest of all our galleys, ships, and vessels" is a Greek port in the Peloponnesus, acquired as part of the spoils of the Fourth Crusade. It contains a major military shipyard, silk-weaving works, warehouses and shops. The city is at the convergence of the two main Venetian shipping routes in the eastern Mediterranean. One runs north through the Aegean to the Black Sea and eventually to Tarfa on the Sea of Azov. The other runs to Crete, Cyprus, Syria and Alexandria. The annual convoys of 15-20 fast galleys and their warship escorts travel together from Venice to Modon, then go their separate ways.

Guilelmo has yet to choose a prince for this sensitive outpost (although he does have ghoul representatives here). A number of candidates have emigrated to the port and each trying to prove their mettle against the local Cainites.

Negroponte (Euboea)

Venice also acquired this city as a spoil of the Fourth Crusade. It is the largest offshore island on the Greek coast of the Aegean. The island is separated from mainland Greece by a 130-foot-wide channel, the Euripos. The channel's strong currents, rushing past up to 14 times a day in alternate directions, make travel to and from the city dangerous. A Venetian double drawbridge with a tower in the center spans the channel. Rumor suggests that faeries and demons built and may still guard this tower.

Venice needs Negroponte as a military base to guard its trade routes along the Aegean to Constantinople and the Black Sea. The governing committee (*Balia*) of Negroponte is one of the most important and powerful Venetian colonial rulers.

Guilelmo has sent Tommaso Brexiano to watch over Negroponte and its key trade routes. Tommaso is a skilled linguist and diplomat familiar with mortal commerce and trade. He has a personal vendetta against the Muslim branch of the Lasombra; his primary interest is raising crusaders against the *Qabilat al-Khayal*. He tried to keep the Fourth Crusade from going to Constantinople. Having failed in that task, he is using his role as

Prince of Negroponte to keep the Latin conquest from becoming an inter-Christian civil war with the ousted Greeks. He strongly encourages crusaders to head to Outremer, and his contacts spy on Muslim leaders who use the surviving Italian trading colonies.

Verona

Ruler: Ezzelino III da Romano

Verona is a city with critical strategic importance for the Empire. It controls a narrow defile leading into the Brenner Pass and a key crossing point for the Adige river. It is a traditional rival to nearby Ferrara and Mantua. In 1164-83, the city allied with local cities and the Lombard League against Frederick I.

Verona's Merchants Guild is a powerful force in the city. It has soldiers to patrol and maintain the roads and garrison key castles. It has its own podestà, council, consuls, treasurer and lesser officials. The guild itself has Guelph sympathies, not out of any deep-seated dislike of the Empire, but because there are better trading opportunities with the Guelph republics than with the Holy Roman Empire. Verona has a community of scholars, but papal recognition of it as a university is unlikely until the city makes peace with the Church.

Ezzelino III da Romano, an ally of Frederick II, rules Verona (see page 118). Ezzelino's alliance is driven in part by Imperial ambitions and in part because the Lombard League decided to support Verona's republic against him in 1225.

For Italy, the city's unlife is relatively peaceful. Livia da Ravenna's childe Orso is prince of the city, and he governs with a firm hand. A number of troublesome Lasombra met Final Death during the 1227 struggles between Ezzelino and the republic. The remainder have been well behaved. Cainite refugees from the Albigensian Crusade and the Inquisition are welcome in Verona as long as they remain polite guests. Those who abuse Orso's hospitality find Ravenna's bishop on their heels.

Notable Cainites

Cato Orsini, Notary

Clan: Nosferatu Ghoul

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Gallant

No longer the frightened youth who met with Rasalon in Rome (in *Libellus Sanguinus IV*), Cato has matured into a master of the Roman social scene. From his home in San Sebastiano, he can swiftly guide a guest through the treacherous shifting papal bureaucracy or through the



dizzying array of purveyors that service the curia, pilgrims and Roman natives. If a piece of information, service or object can be bought or obtained in Rome, Cato has the best chance of securing it — for a price.

Cato is distantly related to the Orsini noble family of Rome. His ties are close enough that he can gain entrance to the higher social circles, yet distant enough that he is not seen as a threat or pawn of any mortal faction. He moves with ease through most Roman social circles, mortal and immortal alike.

Cato is extremely discrete about his Nosferatu patrons, admitting only that he serves the older faction of Nosferatu, not the newcomers who battle with the older Nosferatu and Cappadocians alike. He will relay messages to his masters, and he generally conveys their regrets that they cannot meet with outsiders until the feud in the catacombs is settled.

Guilelmo Aliprando, Prince of Venice

7th-generation Lasombra, childe of Narses, Walker on the Road of Heaven

Nature: Survivor

Demeanor: Loner

Embrace: AD 1049

Apparent Age: mid 30s.

Narses, Prince of Venice and Archbishop of Nod Embraced Guilelmo, the scion of a noble Venetian family, for his obvious skills as a diplomat and negotiator. Guilelmo loyally served as Narses' majordomo and "public face" for nearly a century and a half. Guilelmo is a true believer in the Cainite Heresy and a strong defender of that faith.

In the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade, Guilelmo began to suspect that Narses' dedication to the Heresy was not sincere. He allied with the Tzimisce Nikita of Sredtz, who turned the Crimson Curia, the order's ruling body, against Narses in 1212. Narses fled Venice when he was divested of his mantle as archbishop. Guilelmo called a Court of Blood, and the *Amici Noctis* (see page 86) gave him the right to diablerize Narses. In 1215, he tracked down his sire, committed Amaranth and became Prince of Venice.



Guilelmo has smoothly taken the reigns of Narses' power and alliances. As his master's trusted aide, he was privy to many of Narses' secrets and bargains. Guilelmo's primary concern is securing his new territories in the eastern Mediterranean against Byzantine re-conquest or Muslim invasion. He has encouraged several powerful Venetian Cainites to emigrate to the colonies, both to protect these conquests and to lower the number of rivals at home who might challenge him. The colonization has distracted him from the affairs of the Heresy and the rising threat of the friar-inquisitors.

Livia da Ravenna, Prince of Ravenna

7th-generation Ventrue, childe of Aristophokles, walker on the Road of Humanity

Nature: Defender

Demeanor: Autocrat

Embrace: AD 273

Apparent Age: late 30s

Aristophokles Embraced Livia after she served several decades as manager of one of his estates. For

several centuries, she was his ambassador to the Ventrue and Lasombra princes in Italy and Byzantium, struggling with him to protect Byzantine Ravenna from the barbarians.

When negotiations failed and the Lombards captured Ravenna in 752, Aristophokles was badly wounded in an ambush. Aristophokles suspected that Ngalo, the Lasombra member of Ravenna's coterie, had allied with his Lasombra kin among the Lombards and planned to take control of the city. As his sire had before him, Aristophokles found Livia and commanded her to ritually diablerize him in order to make her fit to rule Ravenna in his place in the name of the Eternal Senate of Rome. She obeyed, rallied the other coterie members to her side and took his place among the coterie despite Ngalo's opposition. She managed to subtly drive the rest of her coterie out of Ravenna, giving her the freedom to push the city's ruler Enzellino III da Romano to expand.

Livia upholds late Imperial Roman ideas. She considers both the Byzantine Empire and the Holy Roman Empire pretenders who have corrupted Rome's name. She hopes that through Ezzelino, she can create a northern Italian state to rival Venice and to demonstrate the true ideals of Rome. She has begun tentative discourse with Julia Antasia in Frankfurt, and still keeps in contact with Lucius Cornelius Scipio and Penelope in Hamburg. Were someone to waylay (or subvert) her messengers, however, these Cainites might suddenly find themselves at odds.







CHAPTER SIX: HUNGARY AND THE SLAVIC EAST

“Either a beast or a god.”

—Aristotle

No other land is quite like this, where the pedigree of the masters of the night runs so pure. Here, in windswept mountains and endless forests, in tiny villages that huddle beneath shadows that are far more than empty darkness, the old ways linger still.

Bulgaria. Poland. The Russian Principalities. Hungary. Transylvania. These lands form the center around which the eldest clans still dance, the flame around which they gather like so many fluttering moths. And if that dance has become darker, bloodier — if that flame burns hotter than ever before — still the vampires continue as they have always done. The old ways linger, and desperate Cainites cling to their traditions with the tips of their talons and scramble madly to understand the changing world around them. The mortals, those “pitiful kine,” have shaken off the burden of years and proven to their complacent overseers in no uncertain terms that they are not so placid as they seem. From the east, a hot wind blows, carrying with it the first whispers of the conflagration to come.

POWERS OF DAY AND NIGHT

MORTALS

Andreas II — King of Hungary. Andreas, despite the length of his reign, is a weak king, unable to control the barons and nobles of his realm. His attempt to buy their loyalty with the proclamation of the Golden Bull only weakened his influence further still. He is responsible for calling the Teutonic Knights to Hungary, and eventually for driving them out.

Ivan Asen II — Tsar of Bulgaria. Descendent of the Ivan Asen who fought to free Bulgaria from the Byzantine Empire, Asen II rules over Bulgaria at the height of that empire's power, and is determined to make his nation more powerful still.

Konrad — Duke of Mazovia. One of the most powerful dukes of the independent Polish states, Konrad has requested the aid of the Teutonic Knights in his battles with Prussia. This choice makes him a potential ally (or pawn) of Lord Jürgen, though Konrad remains ignorant of this fact.

Leszek — Duke of Krakow. Despite holding power in one of Poland's greatest cities, Leszek is a weak and powerless ruler, who uses what remains of his authority as an excuse to indulge in whatever activities strike his fancy. His family has attempted, without success, to mold him into a "real" ruler.

Patryn — Priest of the Bogomil Heresy, operating in Sophia. Along with the Cappadocian Amalia, he seeks to "redeem" the Cainites of the city through forced confession and a "purifying" Final Death in the sunlight.

Vidor — Archbishop of the Bulgarian Church, he is determined to elevate his archbishopric to the status of a patriarchy in the order of the Catholic Church. An ambitious churchman, he has little respect for the secular authority of the state.

CAINITES

Bela Rusenko — (7th-generation Cappadocian) Prince of Sofia. Rusenko is a relatively new prince. The Cainites under his dominion have not yet realized that he is mad as a Malkavian, or that he seeks to unleash forces that could destroy every vampire in the region.

DarvagGrozny — (6th-generation Tzimisce) Grozny dwells in the fallen city of Kiev, and is the closest thing to a prince in the region, even though he refuses to claim any such title. Grozny protects his city from the ravages of all other Cainites, not out of any loyalty to Kiev, but because he himself wishes to tear it down. Grozny was of the Seventh Generation until an encounter with a feral Nosferatu some 10 years ago.

Geza Arpad — (7th-generation Ventrue) Prince and self-proclaimed "Archbishop" of Esztergom. Geza believes that it is his divine duty to test the faith of God's creations, and he is engaged in numerous occult activities that would not be tolerated by the other Cainites of Hungary. His influence, along with that of his city, is slowly fading in light of Buda-Pest's growth, and he is caught up in a vicious rivalry with Prince Rikard.

Nova Arpad — (7th-generation Ventrue) Prince of Mediasch and Hungarian "Overlord." Nova seeks to conquer the Tzimisce of Transylvania and bring the region under Ventrue (and her own personal) control. She has lost a substantial amount of power and status recently, due to the temporary occupation of the region by Lord Jürgen's forces. She still maintains a façade of alliance with Jürgen, but seeks primarily to restore her own power.

Radu — (7th-generation Tzimisce) Voivode of Bistritz. Radu's authority in his demesne has weakened recently, since Vladimir Rustovitch has taken up temporary residence there. Radu, though still loyal to Rustovitch,

is trying to find ways to encourage the other Tzimisce to depart.

Razkoljna — (6th-generation Tzimisce) Prince of Krakow. Razkoljna was recently sent into torpor during a skirmish with several younger Cainites, including one of her own childer. Her absence has enabled other forces to gather power within Krakow.

Vencel Rikard — (7th-generation Ventrue) Prince of Buda-Pest. Until recently, Rikard was forced to devote most of his efforts toward protecting his sire, Bulscu, from the machinations of their enemies. Now that Bulscu is deep in torpor, Rikard can turn his attentions to other matters. None yet know which way he will turn in the struggles that wrack Hungary, but his might is great indeed — now that he means to use it — and it could well turn the tide of whatever conflict he joins. Rikard uses this fact to gather favors from all sides, and he has yet to choose an allegiance.

Vladimir Rustovitch — (6th-generation Tzimisce) Voivode of Voivodes, Tzimisce warlord. Rustovitch still smarts from his failure to garner a real victory against the forces of Jürgen of Magdeburg and his loss of territory to Myca Vykos and the Obertus order. He has retreated from the front and made his haven in Bistritz while he contemplates ways to regain the favor of his underlings, and to thwart the machinations of his rival Noritz.

Yitzhak ben Avraham — (6th-generation Brujah) Ashen Rabbi of Krakow. Yitzhak ben Avraham is a relatively new power in the region, with the perhaps unattainable goal of reuniting Poland as a single state and as a haven for the Jewish people. He has made clever use of Razkoljna's absence to establish his own firm base of power.

From the west come the soldiers of Christ, bound and determined to save heathen souls regardless of the rivers of blood they need shed in the process. The Byzantine Empire, still reeling from the sack of Constantinople at the hands of the Fourth Crusade, has been shaken further still by rebellion in Bulgaria, loosening its hold on the region.

All this within a handful of decades, the mere blink of an eye to the Cainite lords. And this is just the beginning; vampiric affairs have grown *truly* hectic.

War has come to the Slavic East, and no one, Cainite or kine, can remain entirely untouched by the chaos in its wake.

The Way Things Were: The Long Night

From the start of the millennium to the turn of the 13th century, history plodded past the Cainite lords of Eastern Europe like a shadow play. The fact that the fortunes of the undying were swept up in mortal affairs was undeniable, but the lords of the night remained largely stagnant. Wrapped up in scheme and counter-scheme, vampires acted and reacted, but nothing changed.

Across the darkened wilds of Transylvania, the Tzimisce *voivodes* waged a two-pronged war, nominally led by Vladimir Rustovitch. On one front, ensconced in the mist-shrouded chantry of Ceoris, were the Tremere, blood sorcerers who had dared to rape the blessings of undeath from those more worthy, from the Tzimisce themselves. On the other were the Ventrue princes of the west, represented by Nova Arpad, who already held western Hungary in their iron-clad grip. The Tzimisce were many and powerful, but an inability to cooperate with one another — along with a growing, if reluctant, alliance between their foes — prevented them from crushing either enemy as they might have done. Even the kidnapping of Nova Arpad, and her temporary replacement with an obfuscated double, did little to change the situation. When she was finally freed, the Ventrue overlord proved more determined than ever to bring Transylvania under the yoke of the west. The war — both wars — dragged on.

Other conflicts were subtler, if no less deadly. In Krakow, Poland, a secret alliance between the Ventrue Konrad von Aupfholm and the Tremere Claas Drescher slowly chipped away at the power

of Razkoljna, Tzimisce prince. In Buda-Pest, the Ventrue prince Vencel Rikard stood impotent. The necessity of devoting nearly all his attention to protecting Bulscu, his drug-addled sire, from the machinations of “Archbishop” Geza Arpad, prince of Esztergom and distant relative of Nova, left him little able to undertake any other activities. Only the absence of any real threat to his power enabled him to maintain his hold on his city. Basilio the Elder, Lasombra prince of Sofia in Bulgaria, shook with fear as his beloved Byzantine Empire began to lose its hold on his nation, for he could see the grasping hands of many who would take his city from him.

Much was happening — but still nothing changed. Until...

The Way Things Are: The War of Princes

The end of the Long Night was not abrupt. The signs were there to see had the vampires not been too blinded by their own agendas.

The Obertus Diaspora

Spurred on by hunger, desperation and the sudden ascendance of the anti-Catholic Emperor Alexius V to the throne, the soldiers of the Fourth Crusade sacked the splendorous city of Constantinople in April of 1204. For three blood-soaked, soot-stained days and nights, the city burned. Men, women and children lay murdered in the streets. Although the Cainite world was rocked by the death of the Toreador Methuselah Michael, it was the Final Death of the Tzimisce Gesu, head of the Obertus monastic order, that has the most immediate impact on the rest of the Slavic East. With the Library of the Forgotten — the Obertus order’s central locus — burned, the surviving monks were forced to flee Constantinople for other lands. In the years and decades since, the order established a number of libraries and monasteries in major cities — and more than a handful of small towns as well — from Vienna to the Black Sea. (For more on the Fourth Crusade and the fall of Constantinople, see **Bitter Crusade**.)

Symeon, childe of Gesu, grandchilde of the mysterious Dracon, slowly reorganized the Obertus order into a substantial base of power. Devoted as they are to the cataloging of information — primarily religious in nature, but often of more immediate worth as well — the Obertus became Symeon’s eyes

and ears across Eastern Europe. Though the order is still technically answerable to the entire Tzimisce clan to one extent or another, many of the Fiends now avoid Obertus monks, for fear that their requests for information may reveal their schemes and agendas to Symeon — or worse yet, to his grandsire. Therefore, an event that might have brought the Tzimisce a great weapon and source of knowledge to use against their Tremere foes, serves instead only to further damage the clan's already fragile cohesion.

The Shadow of The Cross

In the first decades of the 13th century, the Cumans, who waged periodic wars with Byzantium and Hungary for two centuries, once again threatened Hungarian borders. Perhaps they had simply begun

one of their semi-regular raids, or perhaps they were starting to feel the pressure from the slowly advancing Golden Horde of Genghis Khan that will threaten Hungary itself in years to come. Whichever the case, King Andreas II of Hungary decided to take steps to defend his nation. In 1211, Andreas granted settlement rights in the Barcaság region of southern Transylvania to the Teutonic Knights in exchange for their aid in fending off Cuman aggression.

It was precisely the opening for which the Ventrue lord Jürgen the Sword-Bearer had been waiting. A powerful Cainite with substantial influence in the ranks of the Teutonic Knights, Jürgen used the presence of the knighthood in Hungary to launch his own incursion into territories belonging to Rustovitch and the Tzimisce. Establishing his court at Magdeburg on the Elbe River, Jürgen made his intentions toward Hungary very clear. War with the Tzimisce followed swiftly.

The current Hungarian “overlord,” Nova Arpad, found herself torn between factions. On one hand, Lord Jürgen provided her with the best opportunity she'd ever had to crush the Transylvanian Tzimisce. On the other, the thought that some *other* Ventrue might sweep in and conquer the lands she'd worked so hard to claim was infuriating. Although she actively opposed his efforts for a brief while, Nova gave lip service to Lord Jürgen through most of his occupation and allowed him the use of her own contacts and resources.

Even after Jürgen's withdrawal, his court still represents a mighty presence in the region, if not within Hungary itself — one that Nova still considers a threat to her own dominion. Behind the scenes, however, she has found an unexpected ally.

The Long Reach of the Golden Khan

His name is Jhunakhai, and though few would know it to see him, he is one of the Anda bloodline, the Gangrel-kin who ride with the Mongol Horde. For many years, he fought beneath the banner of the great Genghis Khan, but slowly Jhunakhai has grown curious about the ways of the Western vampires who lurk among the cultures that the Golden Horde subjugated and destroyed. With the reluctant blessings of his clanmates — most of whom couldn't care less about such things, but were willing to humor their brother — Jhunakhai made his way ahead of the advancing Mongols and entered Cainite society in Eastern Europe. Taller than average for his people, Jhunakhai is able to pass for a Middle Easterner with just a bit of effort. His discovery that most local vampires know little about the enigmatic Assamite

MONKS IN THE MIDDLE

In truth, Vladimir Rustovitch is making rather substantial use of the Obertus monks; he's just being sneaky about it. Still reeling and bitter over the territory lost to Myca Vykos and the Obertus, the *Voivode of Voivodes* decided in 1228, that he was damn well going to make use of his “vassals,” even though he knew that Vykos's oaths of fealty weren't worth the human flesh they were written on. He periodically requests that the monks unearth information for him. Some of the requested information — primarily anything in the way of ancient mystic knowledge that might prove valuable in the war against the Tremere — is real enough. A great deal of the information he requests, however, is a blind. He is intentionally misleading the Obertus monks as to his future plans. Since he knows that any requests he makes will eventually reach the ears of Symeon and Vykos, Rustovitch wants to ensure that what they think he's going to do has precious little resemblance to what he's actually doing. Those plans are fairly nebulous at the moment — for now, he acknowledges the need for the buffer state between his own forces and those of Lord Jürgen's court — but he has no intention of simply forgetting that he once ruled the portion of Transylvania now in Obertus hands. Rustovitch is, in fact, already seeking ways to slowly weaken Vykos's power in the “buffer state,” and is constantly searching for agents unconnected with him to carry out his plans in that regard.

clan has enabled him to regularly masquerade as an emissary from the Muslim East. In this capacity, he has even made occasional appearances at the court of Lord Jürgen himself.

Throughout the years of Lord Jürgen's war with Rustovitch, and beyond, Jhunakhai observes carefully, occasionally dispatching animal-borne intelligence and information back to his own people, who draw nearer to Hungary with every passing year. Jhunakhai's efforts have increased the Anda's understanding of their western brethren tenfold, which will make it that much harder for the local Cainites to fight back when invasion finally comes.

Recently, Jhunakhai has engaged in negotiations with Nova Arpad. How she learned of his true identity he does not know, but her proposal intrigues him. If he will use his influence to ensure that the Mongols obliterate all her rivals in one fell swoop — something they might have done anyway, as Lord Jürgen and *Voivode* Rustovitch represent the greatest Cainite military presence in the region — she will provide him intelligence that will greatly ease their takeover of Hungary. Nova believes, correctly, that the Mongols will be unable to hold this territory for long, and she intends to be the only vampire left standing when they depart. Jhunakhai doesn't believe that the Mongols need Nova's intelligence to conquer Hungary, but he cannot dismiss an advantage that might save the lives and unlives of many of his brethren. As of yet, nothing tangible has come of this arrangement, but as the Golden Horde approaches, now under the command of Genghis's younger son Ogadei Khan, it is only a matter of time before all of Hungary reaps the bloody harvest that the desperate Ventrue has sown.

The Obertus State

In the years following the arrival of the Teutonic Knights, the Cuman incursions were indeed curbed, but the cost grew higher than King Andreas was willing to bear. The knights demand further settlement rights and further exemptions from laws and taxes. King Andreas's power was already threatened by the growing influence of the barons and landowners. The proclamation of the Golden Bull in 1222 (see sidebar), which granted further exemptions to those lords in the hopes that it might buy their support, backfired. While some did indeed lend more support to the king, others continued amassing their own power and influence.

In the face of his waning authority, Andreas reacted poorly to the demands of the Teutonic

THE GOLDEN BULL

Many local Cainites would love to take credit for this proclamation, but they really had nothing to do with it. The Byzantine Emperor Manuel I Comnenus largely decentralized political power in Hungary when he seized control of the Hungarian throne in the latter half of the 12th century and bestowed huge grants of land to his supporters. Although the influence of the Empire faded after Manuel died in 1180, the damage was done. Few of Hungary's lords felt any real obligation toward their king. King Andreas's Golden Bull was intended to make the nobility indebted to the crown by granting them even more rights and power — not, perhaps, the brightest idea he might have come up with (though some suggest the lords themselves forced him into making this proclamation).

The fact that the bull also served the Ventrue, Tzimisce and other local Cainite lords, many of whom were themselves landowners (or were the true power behind landowners) was simply an added benefit, and not the result of any vampiric manipulation.

Knights, banishing them from Hungary in 1225. Simultaneously, Myca Vykos and the Obertus took a hand in the constant warring between Lord Jürgen and Rustovitch and forced a settlement, forming an Obertus-dominated Cainite "state" between the feuding lords' territories. (Although Vykos technically swore fealty to Rustovitch, doing so was hardly more than a formality; the *Voivode* of *Voivodes* has lost the territory claimed by the Obertus, and he knows it.) The Teutonic Knights left Hungary, though they remained in control of many outlying areas, and turned their attentions elsewhere. (For more on the war between Jürgen and Rustovitch, and the creation of the Obertus state, see **Under The Black Cross**.)

From 1225 onward, a state of cold war exists between the two courts. The *voivode*'s raiders occasionally cross Obertus lines to strike against the Ventrue's holdings in Germany. Rustovitch, who has still proven unable to crush the Tremere and who can claim, at best, a moral victory against Lord Jürgen, is in desperate need of a real triumph. The Tzimisce *voivodes* are a fractious lot to begin with, and those who follow Rustovitch do not do so with any real enthusiasm. In the face of his constant failures, many of the Fiends grow more and more contemptuous of his authority.

The Tzimisce Methuselah Noriz, a long-time rival of Rustovitch, calls loudly for a new order. If Rustovitch cannot prove his worth, quickly and decisively, he may wish that he *had* fallen to the Ventrue.

For his own part, Jürgen, unable to easily slip any large forces through Vykos's domain, has no viable means of counterattacking the Tzimisce lord, and his frustration grows nightly. For now, the Teutonic Knights' coming crusade against Prussia occupies his attentions, but he still stewes over his defeat in Hungary. Lord Jürgen is constantly looking for ways to strike back at Rustovitch without endangering his other activities, and might well be beholden to anyone who could take Rustovitch down a peg or three.

The Omen War

The Tzimisce aren't the only faction fighting a war on two fronts. The Tremere, in addition to fighting the Omen War with the Fiends, have spent many of the past years battling back the forces of the Order of Hermes, a tradition of mortal magi to which the Tremere once belonged. This *Massasa* War stretched the resources of the Tremere to the utmost, and the Tzimisce would surely have swept them under had that clan not been engaged in its own struggles with Lord Jürgen.

It is not entirely coincidence that things have progressed thus. For all the vitriol spewed at the mention of the Tremere, many of the local princes recognize an asset when they see one, and this youngest of clans has made numerous hidden alliances in

recent years. The most obvious is with the Ventrue themselves. Lord Jürgen has a Tremere envoy at his court, Nova Arpad deals with the Warlocks as enemies of her enemy, and — until recently — Claas Drescher, founder of the Krakow chantry, worked hand-in-hand with the Ventrue Konrad von Aupfholm.

More surprisingly, however, is the budding alliance between the Tremere of Ceoris and an ancient Nosferatu known simply as Siamko, who appeared from the Russian steppes some four decades gone. Although none of the local Nosferatu appears to know Siamko personally, he seems able to call in favors from a great many of them, boons owed to this friend or that great-grandchilde of Siamko's. He has placed his entire network of informants at the disposal of the Tremere, and the information garnered has already allowed the Usurpers to prepare for Tzimisce and Gangrel assaults that might otherwise have cost them dearly. Precisely why Siamko is aiding the Tremere is unclear. The ancient has made cryptic comments to the effect that he had a long-standing grudge against the Salubri, and that this is his method of rewarding the Tremere for their attempts to exterminate that clan, but few among the Tremere's highest levels believe that this is the whole truth. Still, Siamko's network is an asset that

WHY GRANDMA, WHAT BIG TEETH...

The local Nosferatu have a very good reason for cooperating with Siamko — they're terrified of him. No one can know for certain, but rumor among the Lepers has it that Siamko is the spawn of none other than Baba Yaga, the Iron Hag of Russia. Why the witch's childe would be interested in helping the Tremere is a mystery even to the well-informed Nosferatu, but theories abound. The current favorite is that Siamko is concerned about some *other* ancient evil that slumbers beneath the lands of the region — in particular, that he fears the legendary Kupala might prove a threat to the Hag herself, and that he has settled on the blood magic of the Tremere as the best means of destroying or containing the demon. Others suggest that Siamko, or even Baba Yaga herself, bears the Tzimisce some grudge from ancient times, and this is a way of striking back at them.

The true story may forever remain a mystery, since Siamko himself isn't talking — and the other Nosferatu wouldn't ask, anyway.

AGENTS PROVOCATEURS

Not all the raids on Lord Jürgen's territories that come from the Obertus lands are launched by Rustovitch, although the Ventrue lord is certainly meant to think they are. With the Tzimisce occupied in fighting off the Ventrue incursion, the Tremere enjoyed unprecedented success in their own war with the Fiends. The Usurpers were less than thrilled to see the end of the Jürgen's conflict with the Tzimisce, and they have decided that it will not die down completely. Even as they negotiate alliances with the Sword-Bearer, they stage attacks on his lands designed to fan the flames of his anger against the Tzimisce. It is a dangerous game they play — particularly since the Tremere at Jürgen's court in Magdeburg (see Chapter Three) might well pay the price if it fails.

they cannot afford to dismiss. They work alongside the mysterious Nosferatu for now, but they keep a very close eye on him.

For a time, the tide of the Omen War was at low ebb. The Tzimisce and the Tremere were both too involved in other conflicts to devote as much time to one another as they might have liked. With the end of the *Massasa* War and the departure of the Teutonic Knights, the Fiends and the Warlocks once more eye one another with hateful gazes. Here, however, the inability of the Tzimisce to cooperate has cost them. By the year 1230, the Tremere have launched the next stage in the Omen War by doing something they have never before accomplished.

The Warlocks have taken the offensive.

Their first moves were subtle, but that subtlety didn't last. At the direction of the Tremere witch Virstania, Gargoyles drop from the low-hanging clouds of the Carpathians, not merely to meet the forces of the Tzimisce who dare approach Ceoris, but to attack deep in the *voivodes'* own territories. Entire villages burn from the face of the earth, Tzimisce herds exterminated or scattered to the four winds. Storms of unnatural fury speed across the darkened skies, rudely ignoring such mundane concerns as wind and weather, to crash against the hastily erected *koldunic* defenses of the Fiends.

Nor have the Usurpers limited their assault to mystic techniques. Tzimisce princes and *voivodes* across Eastern Europe find their agents murdered in the streets, or else never find them at all. More than one of the fledgling Obertus monasteries has been ransacked, its ghoulish caretakers slain, its secrets plundered.

The situation cannot last. The Tremere know that the Tzimisce, though slow to move, will not permit such brazen assaults to go unanswered. The Usurpers act as swiftly as they dare, then, determined to cause as much damage to their foe as possible before the slumbering dragon fully awakens and the Omen War once more turns into a conflict of attrition.

The Regions of Eastern Europe

These are the largest events of Cainite society, wars and conflicts that impact the entirety of the Slavic East, but they are hardly the only vampiric machinations afoot. What follows is a brief look at several of the region's most important countries and provinces, including a description of the area itself, a quick examination of the way of life of the



region's kine and a discussion of the area's most active Cainites. Storytellers and players who seek more detail than we can provide in a chapter of this length are encouraged to consult **Transylvania by Night** or better yet, to research the region's rich culture and history on their own.

BRING OUT YOUR DEAD!

Although the Black Death is still many years away, smaller plagues ravage Eastern Europe — indeed, the entirety of the Medieval world — on a regular basis. At a time when medical knowledge is nearly nonexistent, when even a minor virus or an infected wound is as likely to kill as not, a substantial portion of the populace sickens. Influenza, leprosy and a host of other afflictions strike without warning, and the reaction of the populace is brutal in its fear. The ill are often locked inside their homes and left to die, so that they may not infect others. Some homes are burned with their residents still inside. Streets fall silent, save for the coughs and whimpers of the dying and the incessant droning of flies that feast on the dead. On occasion, entire villages are abandoned, and those too sick to travel left behind to rot. Disease is often blamed on the activities of “undesirables,” and many foreigners, pagans and Jews have been murdered in retaliation for “infecting” good Christians.

Some of these diseases are spread not by men or even by insects or rats, but by the Cainites themselves. Many of the Low Clans feed from the destitute, and a Nosferatu or Malkavian can easily pick up a disease in one village and pass it to another. Even the kine have learned that illness can be used as a weapon, often using corpses to infect an enemy's water supply and streets during siege. It should come as no surprise, then, that some Cainites use their capacity to carry sickness as a weapon against a rival's herd, deliberately infecting a servant or cat's-paw and then transplanting him into enemy territory. (See Chapter Three for a particular case of this sort of warfare.)

It's easy, of course, for this rather primitive form of biological warfare to spread out of control, but most vampires don't consider that possibility until it's too late.

Hungary

The center of Hungary, called Transdanubia, consists largely of great lowland expanses. It is bounded on the west by the easternmost reaches of the Alps and on the north by the Danube River. Transdanubia is home to Lake Balaton, the largest freshwater lake in Europe, and vast expanses of the region are covered in thick forests of oak and beech, through which stalk wild packs of black-furred Lupines and other, more sinister creatures. The Little Alföld (or Little Hungarian Plain), a fertile region, well suited to farming, lies to the northwest. It is separated from the Great Alföld (Great Hungarian Plain) by a low mountain system that runs across the country from the southwest to the northeast and forms the backbone of Transdanubia. Many of the nation's villages and roads follow this range, or the Carpathians to the north, making both farming and travel quite difficult in some regions. The Tisza River, which floods the low-lying plains on a yearly basis, bisects the Great Alföld. The western reaches are fertile, while the eastern expanses are drier and more difficult to farm. The Hungarian climate is relatively cool. The winters are frigid (and wet, to boot), and the summer months are only moderately warm.

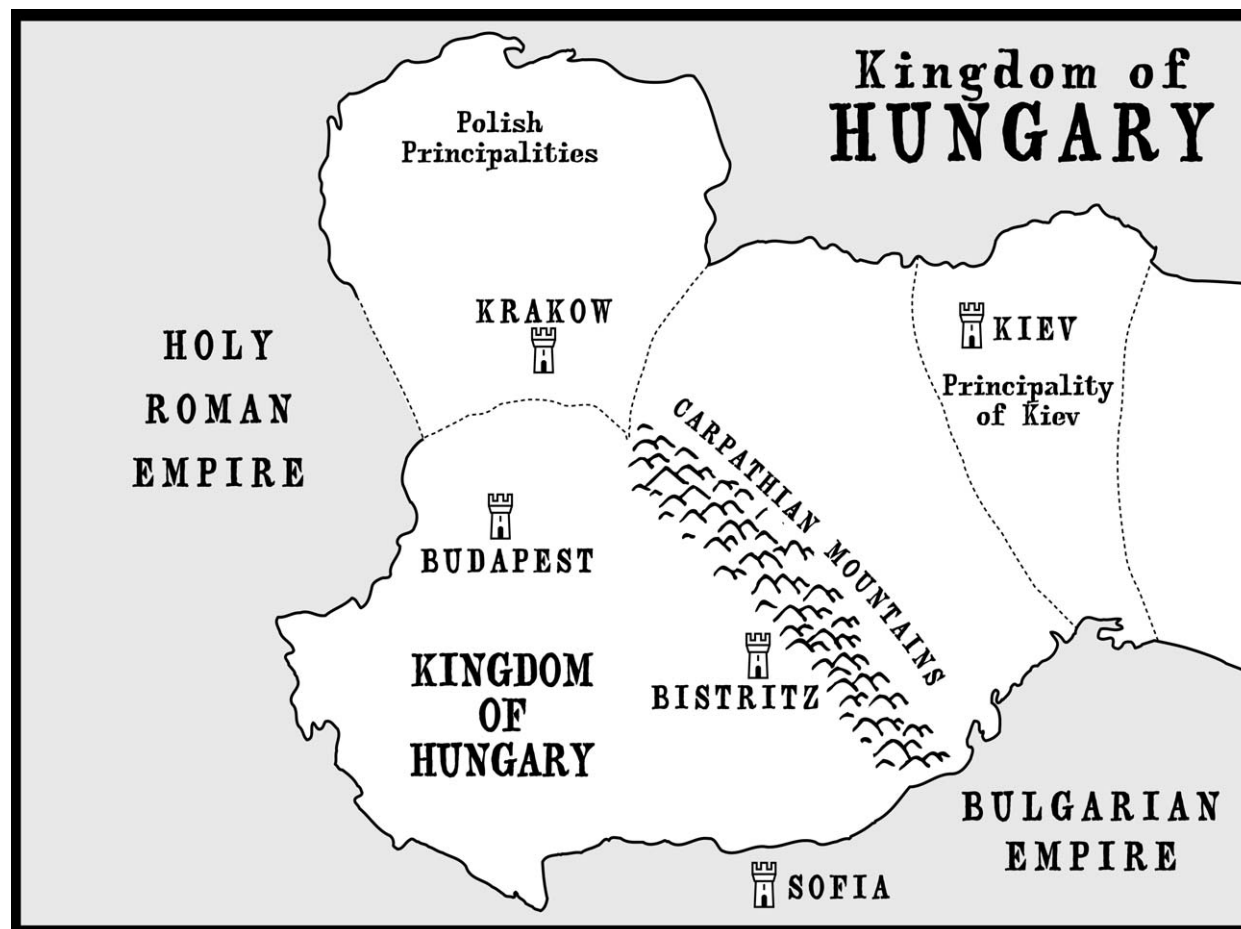
Way of Life

How well one lives in Hungary is at least partially dependent upon both one's pedigree and one's religion. In 1230, Hungary is officially a Catholic nation, but the reach of the pope really extends only as far as the western borders of Transylvania. The eastern and southern portions of Hungary remain firmly Eastern Orthodox — those that are not still pagan. Practicing Catholicism in the eastern portions of the country, or Orthodoxy or paganism in the west, mark one for social ostracism at least — imprisonment, forced conversion or even death at worst. Nor is religion the only worry a Hungarian has, for he may find himself condemned merely for the blood in his veins. The Hungarians (formerly the Magyars, from which stock springs the ruling Arpad family) and Szeklers (descendents of Turks who fought at the vanguard of the Hungarian armies when they first entered Transylvania) rule in a harsh feudal system borrowed from the western nations. The Saxons, invited to own land by King Geza II in 1141, and the Vlachs, who claim to be descended from natives of the region who predate even the Magyars, toil in the fields as serfs. Many such families were stripped of their ancestral lands for the dual crimes of being non-Catholic and non-Hungarian/

Szekler. Although several cities in Western Hungary have reached moderate sizes — the largest can claim around 6,000 inhabitants — the vast majority of the country's populace lives in tiny villages of no more than 200 souls. Often little more than a smattering of wooden hovels around a small church and a single dirt road, the peasants and serfs eke out a meager subsistence, living off what little portion of their crop is not taken by their feudal lords. Others labor in Hungary's mines, lugging silver and gold into the daylight to be turned over to their lords. Most grow old before their time, if they do not perish quickly of lung ailments or collapsing mine shafts. The peasants are often dirty and fearful — and not only of their mortal lords, but of the things that they know stalk the nights beyond their tiny villages. Few of them ever know anything of life outside their hometowns, and are highly suspicious of foreigners. They are a superstitious folk — with good reason, some might say — and many are staunch followers of whatever their chosen faith may be. The Eastern Orthodox are particularly devout in this regard. A Cainite hunting among these people might be surprised æ or worse æ by the strength of their faith.

The ruling landowners have it somewhat easier. These boyars (a local position somewhere between a minor lord, a mayor and a tax-collector) and *voivodes* collect goods, tributes and taxes from the serfs who labor beneath them, some of which they pay in turn to their own superiors. The barons of Hungary bow to no one, not even King Andreas. They pay no taxes and often rule their principalities like independent nations. Even they have their problems, however. The Cuman raids, though far less frequent than they were before the coming (and going) of the Teutonic Knights, still nibble away at Hungarian goods and resources. These are not nearly so great a problem as those knights themselves. Moving west and north, eyeing Poland and Prussia like hungry wolves, some Teutonic Knights still find the time to retaliate for their exile from Hungary. Many lone travelers, caravans and even small towns are set upon by warriors who are no better than brigands, and the people of Hungary suffer further still.

Some Hungarian Cainites continue their class, religious and racial prejudices even beyond death. Most local Ventrue select childer from the ranks of Catholic Hungarians, for instance, while a prepon-



BRANCASTLE

It seemed such a minor thing at the time. When the Teutonic Knights moved in, they took possession of a bit of land in the Carpathian Mountains, overlooking the Borgo Pass. There they constructed a castle, called Bran. Occupied for a time by Lord Jürgen's forces, it was left vacant when they were expelled in 1225.

The castle is unimportant now, and largely forgotten, but it stands in 1230, and will stand for many years to come. It will one night serve as home and haven to the most infamous Cainite of Transylvania.

What happens to it between now and then — and what it might yet contain — is up to the Storyteller.

derance of native Tzimisce refuse to Embrace anyone not of Vlach or Romanian heritage.

Although it is a single country on the map, the western and eastern portions of Hungary might as well be two separate nations. Both kine and Cainite politics differ greatly from one region to the next, as do cultural norms, religious beliefs and the like.

Western Hungary

From the Cainite perspective, Western Hungary is more "civilized" than the east, but that does not make it any less dangerous. Largely the domain of the Ventrue lords, Western Hungary is a hotbed of intrigue and scheming, particularly now that Lord Jürgen has staked a claim to the region.

Buda-Pest

Although it will one day be the greatest city in Hungary and is but a handful of years from becoming Hungary's new capital, Buda-Pest is still currently overshadowed by Esztergom. A center of trade, particularly of goods that come down the Danube, Buda-Pest nevertheless lacks the more "civilized" feel of Hungary's current capital. Despite the comforts and (supposed) safety offered by the city, few of its inhabitants can forget that they sit very near the fearful Transylvanian wilds. Still, this is a large, rapidly growing population center, with a substantial amount of mortal and vampiric intrigue.

The "city" actually consists of three linked but separate towns. Buda and Obuda (Old Buda) lie to the west of the Danube, in an area of forested hills.

Pest, on the east side, maintains its independence as a separate province, except in times of war or other catastrophe, at which time its inhabitants are only too glad to take advantage of Buda's stronger position and better defenses.

Even Obuda, the oldest of the three towns, was not the first community built here. The Celts built the town of Ak Ink on the slopes of Gellert Hill, and remnants and artifacts of their occupation can be found even in 1230. The Roman fortified town of Aquincum arose nearby (mirrored by Contra-Aquincum across the river), and it was the capital of the Roman province of Pannonia until the withdrawal of the Empire. Over the following centuries, Obuda slowly appeared over the ruins of Aquincum, and was itself allowed to fall into disuse. The Magyar tribe that eventually settled the region and became the Hungarians of the 13th century set about building upon the ruins of Obuda.

Tonight, Buda-Pest is the fastest growing city in Hungary, a fact that has caused the Cainite population to increase despite the lack of any major governmental bodies located here. Until recently, vampires in Buda-Pest were left largely to their own devices. Vencel Rikard, the city's prince, was too caught up in watching over his sire, Bulscu, who was swiftly succumbing to various drugs imported from the east. Within the past year, however, Bulscu deliberately sank into torpor as a means of escaping the ravages of the drugs, leaving Rikard free to act as prince for the first time in years. The Ventrue has begun taking a very active interest in the affairs of his city, and all the forces arrayed throughout Hungary keep a very close watch on him. The assumption is that he will *probably* ally himself with his clanmates against the Tzimisce *voivodes*. Rikard, however, has a longstanding grudge against Geza Arpad, and if that hatred carries over to Nova, a relative of Geza's, no one can say which way Rikard — and the resources of Buda-Pest — may turn.

Although the city is ostensibly Christian, many of its inhabitants still worship pagan gods, and the cult of the Magyar god Havnor grows particularly strong. That the "god" they worship is none other than the Malkavian prophet Octavio is known to almost no one, Cainite or kine. For his own part, Octavio's plans to use his growing cult to move against Prince Rikard and against the demon Kupala — or perhaps it was against Rikard but *for* Kupala, or *for* Rikard but *against* Kupala, or... In any case, his plans have advanced not one whit in the decades since the Madman took on the identity of the god, and they do not look likely to move ahead

any time soon. This is not to say that Octavio has not made an impact on the Cainite political landscape; see the section on the city of Sofia in Bulgaria.

Esztergom

The capital city of Hungary in 1230, Esztergom still outshines Buda-Pest, although its glory and its influence are both noticeably fading. Situated in an area of heavily forested slopes, Esztergom perches beside the Danube River like an elegant spider, and serves as a large trading center in addition to housing both the secular and spiritual seats of power. The city itself is built partially upon a rocky plateau, called Castle Hill. Atop it stand the Royal Palace (home and court of King Andreas II), the Bishop's Palace (which houses the Archbishop of all Hungary) and the massively domed Cathedral of Saint Adalbert.

Although it receives a great many ambassadors and merchants, Esztergom remains strangely isolated from the events that befall the rest of Hungary. An outpost of "civilization," the city is far more western in feel than are other regions of the country. The nobility and clergy are often quite wealthy, and frequently more concerned with maintaining their own status than actually ruling the nation.

The city itself is divided into a number of districts. The two most well known are the Archiepiscopal Town, which is considered to be church property and under canonical, not secular, law; and Royal Town, which is found in the center of the city. Royal Town houses Esztergom's main marketplace, its main port and all the king's staff and court. It also houses a rather sizable population of Nosferatu. These outcasts tend to be particularly religious, especially for Cainites. They vehemently oppose the activities of "Archbishop" Geza, but they have insufficient strength to act against him directly as of yet.

Ensnared within the Archiepiscopal Town is the Church of the Magdalene, below which can be found catacombs in which many holy men are buried — and in which the Ventrue Geza Arpad, prince and self-proclaimed Archbishop of Esztergom, makes his lair. Geza is obsessed with the notion of defilement, and performs regular rituals to taint the holy aura of this place. In recent years, his actions have begun to draw the attentions of something in the shadows. Geza believes it to be the legendary demon Kupala, but he may not be entirely correct in his assumptions. In the Tremere Chantry of Ceoris can be found a room warded with many mystical sigils, in which a small horde of demons is permanently imprisoned. Neither

Geza nor the Tremere could possibly know that each time Geza performs his rituals, the demons in Ceoris grow still, as though listening to a distant call....

Eastern Hungary - Transylvania

"The Land Beyond the Forest" is still a wild place, a part of Hungary in name alone. Here can be found precious few cities of any size. Instead the rolling, wooded landscape is dotted with scores of tiny villages, many of which can claim their own monstrous Tzimisce "caretaker." It is surrounded by three distinct mountain ranges, and even the very peaks often sport a thick woodland covering. These mountains are riddled with caves and draped in perpetual clouds. Horrors of all sorts lurk in the heights, and even the ancient Tzimisce have not discovered them all. Though beautiful, the land is sick. Corruption slicks the waters, and the trees silently cry their agony to the uncaring clouds above. Some hideous disease seeps through the soil here, a creeping pestilence that is blamed — by those few Cainites who know of it — on the mythical Kupala himself.

THE DEMON'S TOUCH

Kupala is mysterious. Kupala is evil. Kupala is the source of the land's corruption.

Kupala is convenient.

By blaming the sickness of Transylvania on a creature that may exist only in legend, the Tzimisce have absolved themselves of any responsibility for their own actions. The truth is that there may or may not be a demon — but a great portion of the pestilence that lurks in the soils and rivers of the land beyond the forest is of the Fiends' own making. Their ancient *koldunic* sorceries rape their magics from the earth around them, leaving an unnatural taint that takes centuries to fade. Yorak's Cathedral of Flesh spreads its unholy tendrils throughout the Carpathians, and the plants, the soil, the very stone shies away from its touch. Thousands of years of blood and worse than blood have been spilled throughout Transylvania, and the land has drunk it all in... like a vampire.

If Kupala *does* exist, he must be delighted indeed. He has, it seems, a great deal of free time, for so very many Cainites seem willing to do his job for him.

The Cities of Transylvania

None of the cities of the east can begin to compare with Esztergom or Buda-Pest, either in terms of size or splendor, and those that exist are the result of Saxon settlers and Cainite influence, rather than any local desire. Even those few communities that house over 1,000 inhabitants seem little more than backward towns. They are ungainly rather than majestic, swollen rather than grown. Citizens pretend to be less rustic and less fearful than their “small-town” neighbors, but their lives are very much the same combination of exhaustion and fear. The most common pastimes, for those who can afford time away from their daily labors, involve cheap taverns and filthy brothels. Only four of Transylvania’s cities even have Cainite princes. One of those, Mediasch, rarely sees its prince, Nova Arpad, anymore. Although she is still determined to crush the local Tzimisce, she spends more and more time these nights traveling between her own domain and that of Lord Jürgen.

The city of Bistritz is the domain of *Voivode* Radu, ally of Vladimir Rustovitch. After the war with Lord Jürgen, Rustovitch wisely decided to remove himself from the reach of the Ventrue’s agents (though he claims that the move is intended to place him closer to the conflict with the Tremere). As a temporary measure, then, the *Voivode* of *Voivodes* has moved his haven from his court and castle in central Hungary to the city of Bistritz. Intended from the beginning to be a temporary measure, the arrangement will not likely last out the decade. In the interim, however, it is causing a substantial degree of friction between Rustovitch and the normally amiable (for a Tzimisce) Radu. Whether their alliance can survive the strain remains to be seen.

Ceoris

An imposing fortress high in the mist-shrouded Carpathian peaks, Ceoris is currently the heart and soul of the Tremere clan. Protected by defenses both mystical and mundane, patrolled by Gargoyles on the wing and creatures summoned from places better left unmentioned, it is considered largely unassailable. Tremere himself slumbers deep in the bowels of the chantry, watched over by his loyal companion Etrius. For the first time, it also serves as a staging ground for Tremere offensives, and not merely a last line of defense.

But all is not well within the towering walls of Ceoris. The back-stabbing intrigue for which the Tremere will soon become widely known is already

in full swing, as faction vies with faction, preventing the Warlocks from unleashing their full might upon their Tzimisce foes. Creatures lurk the halls, not quite as fully controlled as the thaumaturgists might believe, and an entire wing has been sealed off to prevent the escape of demons summoned by a colossal error on the part of Etrius himself. (See both **House of Tremere** and the previous discussion of Esztergom and Geza Arpad for a bit more on these infernal creatures.) And although their resistance will be crushed soon enough, a very few mortal members of House Tremere remain, determined to escape the transformation into undeath being forced upon them by the order of Tremere himself.

The Tremere may no longer stand on the brink of extinction, as once they did, but it will be many years yet before they can claim the position in Cainite affairs that is “rightfully” theirs.

THE ALL-SEEING EYE

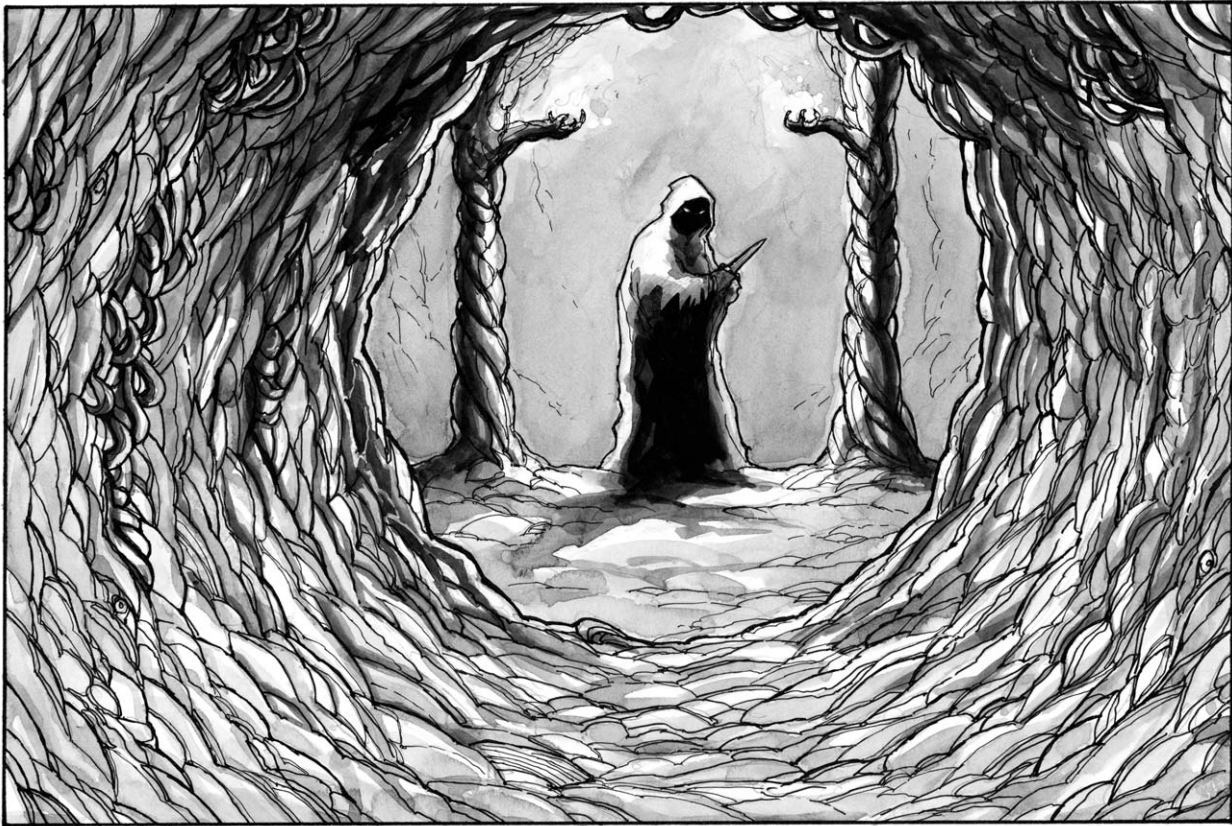
Thirty years ago, at the turn of the century, the Ventrue sent an ally of theirs — a Ravnos vampire by the name of Vassily Taltos — to Yorak. Ostensibly an emissary, Taltos was in fact a sacrifice, a pawn to be forfeited in a greater game. The Ravnos turned the tables on his betrayers, however, buying his freedom from the Tzimisce with information on Ventrue activities. He also assisted the Methuselah in capturing Dominic, a Carthaginian Brujah who even now suffers in the halls of the cathedral.

Taltos is a pragmatic Scion, and nothing he did to purchase his freedom should bother him overmuch. Those who knew the Ravnos before his time with Yorak, however, claim that they can see a strangely haunted look in his eyes.

That’s only half correct. They *are* haunted — but they are not Vassily’s eyes.

This was the other price of the Ravnos’ freedom, one that he has never admitted to another living (or unliving) soul. Vassily Taltos is now and forever a spy for Yorak, for the Tzimisce has literally placed eyes of his own creation in the Charlatan’s skull. Anything Taltos sees, Yorak sees, and so Yorak learns more than he would even with his frequent psychic sojourns in the lands beyond his fleshy walls.

Eternal vigilance, they say, is the price of freedom, and it is a price Vassily Taltos will be paying for many years to come...



The Cathedral of Flesh

Also hidden somewhere in the Carpathian Mountains, the abode of the Tzimisce Methuselah Yorak is nightmare made — and made of — flesh. Endless twisting corridors and strangely shaped rooms spread throughout these mountain catacombs, constructed of the flesh and organs of thousands upon thousands of living sacrifices. The walls are shaped and kept alive by the ancient's mastery of Vicissitude, and anyone with the slightest hint of spiritual sensitivity (or Auspex) can hear the psychic screams of these tormented souls ringing endlessly through the foothills. Yorak himself stalks the halls, never deigning to set foot beyond his Cathedral, and he grows wise by telepathically stripping the knowledge contained in suffering minds. Of all the horrors Transylvania has to offer, the Cathedral of Flesh may well be the worst of the lot.

Bulgaria

The Balkan Mountains (in Bulgarian, the *Stara Planina*, or Old Mountains) run through the center of Bulgaria, tracing a line east to west that bisects a good portion of the nation. The plateau to the north, the Danubian Plain, is fertile, with excellent farmland to be found from the Balkans to the Danube River

that marks Bulgaria's northern boundary. To the south stretches the Sofia (or Thracian) Plain, nestled defensively between the Balkans, the Lyulin Mountains to the west and the Sredna Gora Mountains to the south. The southern expanses of Bulgaria boast yet another expanse of mountains, including the ranges Rodopi, Belasita, Rila and Pirin. These last two are also home to several hundred glacial lakes. The Black Sea forms the eastern border of Bulgaria, which allows for a substantial amount of mercantile activity in the region. Bulgaria receives a great deal of rain in the winter months, but its summers are hot and dry.

Way of Life

The Bulgarian situation has changed dramatically in the past decades. It has been but 45 years since the nation, led by the brothers Ivan and Peter Asen, successfully threw off the yoke of the Byzantine Empire. Bulgaria has shifted from subjugated state to the greatest power in the Balkans; and from an Orthodox state to Catholic (under the Asen brothers and their successor, Kaloyan), and then back to Orthodox. The current Tsar, Ivan Asen II, rules over the height of the Bulgarian Empire. The Bulgarian church grows in stature as well, even though Archbishop Vidor has

not yet succeeded in attaining his goal of restoring his archbishopric to a patriarchy.

All of this, of course, means little to the peasantry of Bulgaria. While the nobility and the upper classes enjoy newfound prosperity, and the larger cities such as Sofia and Turnovo grow larger and richer, the majority of Bulgaria's citizens live in villages not unlike those found in Hungary. In many respects, were one placed beside the other, only variations in language and dress might distinguish them. Because the nation lacks Hungary's emphasis on mining, however, nearly all Bulgaria's peasantry are farmers. Furthermore, many more of those farmers are freemen (if still poverty-stricken and struggling), rather than serfs. Although a sense of national pride inspired many to laud their freedom from Byzantium, some Bulgarians secretly longed for the days of the empire for many years after they gained independence. They lived in fear of the Russian tribes, the Turks and the German Empire, all of which had become a much greater threat now that Bulgaria stands on its own. By 1230, the growing strength of the Bulgarian Empire has made such incursions less likely, but raids and invasion still weigh heavily on people's minds.

Although the Bulgarians must deal with the same horrors as their Hungarian neighbors, and the Tzimisce rule the nights here no less than in Transylvania, the locals are neither as superstitious nor as suspicious as the Transylvanians. This is not to say that they particularly welcome strangers, of course, or that they do not have their own superstitions, but those superstitions are not so great a part of day-to-day life.

Bulgaria does not have the racial conflicts of Hungary to deal with, but religion is as popular a target as ever. The archbishopric is beginning a move to purge Bulgaria of all nonbelievers (pagans, Jews and other "undesirables") as a means of gaining favor with the Church. Most Bulgarians are Orthodox, but a number of Catholics abide here as well. Until recently, a sizable minority of the population followed the Bogomil Heresy, which espouses the belief that Satan, the youngest son of God, was the creator of the world, and that Jesus was sent to save humanity from his "brother." They reject most traditional forms of worship, espouse abstinence, chastity and other forms of asceticism. Although the Church has succeeded in wiping out the majority of the Bogomil Heresy by 1230, a few pockets of belief remain, scattered throughout the Bulgarian countryside and hidden in the cities. The strongest bastion of Bogomilism lies in the city of Sofia, in a hidden sanctuary called


the Church of the Holy Light. Here, Father Patryn leads those faithful who remain — and conspires with the Cappadocian Amalia to "redeem" the other area Cainites, even if it means dragging them bodily into the sun. They seek the purification of all Cainites, hoping that through forced confession and destruction by the sun, these vampires may find their place in Heaven. Despite her horrific acts, Amalia's motives are pure (to her mind, at least). She has not yet realized that the violence of the hunt has begun to corrupt the soul of her ally, Father Patryn. They are particularly likely to move against Cainites who are newly arrived in Sophia, for fear that these itinerant vampires might escape their grasp without being "saved."

Sofia

Sofia can be found in the heights of the Sofia Plain. The largest city in Bulgaria, Sofia has a long — and chaotic — history. Originally settled by a Thracian tribe called the Serdi many centuries before Christ, the city was conquered by the Romans 400 years later. Re-christened Triaditsa, the city was fortified and became the capital of Inner Dacia. It stood there until it was sacked by the Huns in 441, rebuilt by the Byzantine Empire, conquered by the First Bulgarian Empire in the ninth century (and once more renamed, now called Sredets), conquered by Byzantium again in 1018 and finally retaken for Bulgaria by the Asen brothers only a few decades back. Only since that time has the name of the city changed again. By 1230, nearly everyone refers to it as Sofia.

Tonight, Sofia prospers. Its markets are full of goods from every point on the map; as a center of trade for much of Eastern Europe, merchants of every stripe can be found here, from Western Europeans to Turks. Sofia's holiday festivals are bright and cheerful; men and women laugh aloud, and children run through the streets. But beneath it all lurks an undercurrent of fear, for everyone from lowest peasant to highest noble can never forget that his fate remains in the hands of someone higher still. When the festivals end, when the markets close, most Bulgarians take to their homes and bar their doors and windows, and those who remain out and about do well to keep one eye turned behind.

The city stands heavily defended. The remainders of the old Roman fortifications have been added to and strengthened by both Byzantine and Bulgarian defenders, and watchtowers loom from the walls and the main gate, ensuring that no enemy can approach



undetected. The Perlovets and Vladaya Rivers flank the city, ensuring a constant supply of water in times of siege, and the surrounding mountains conspire to protect the city like a second ring of impenetrable walls. In the west of the city, on the ruins of the old Roman fortress, stands Serdica Castle, the greatest structure in Sofia and former home of the city's prince.

The Lasombra Basilio the Elder is gone. Having barely survived an assassination attempt by an Assamite he had grown to trust, saddened by Bulgaria's break from Byzantium and never having quite recovered from the news of the sack of Constantinople, Basilio has departed Sofia forever, returning to his native Iberia. Half a dozen ambitious Tzimisce made a frantic bid for the principedom — only to discover that a new player in the game had beaten them to it.

The new Prince of Sofia is not a native Bulgarian at all. His features and his mannerisms mark him as Hungarian, though he has mastered the language and the customs of Bulgaria well enough. Sharp features, dark eyes and soot-colored hair give him a constantly brooding appearance, and they clash awfully with his pallid, waxen skin. His name is Bela Rusenko, of the Cappadocians. He is a former disciple of the Malkavian prophet Octavio, and he is dangerously insane. See the end of this chapter for more on Prince Bela, and what his reign may mean for Sofia and all of Bulgaria.

Sofia is also well known for its underground mineral springs, which feed a number of thermal baths throughout the city in which people come to gather, bathe and gossip as the Romans did. The most luxurious of these baths is the House of the Eagle. Built in the Roman style and located well north of the central market, it is a popular haunt of the city's elite. The proprietor, Jorgi the Bear, was a ghoul of Prince Basilio, yet with the departure of his former master, he has been forced to find his vitae elsewhere.

Beneath the House of the Eagle, springs flow from caves that lead deep into the earth of the Sofia Plain — and in some of those caves, things are stirring. When the Library of the Forgotten in Constantinople burned, many of the Obertus monks scattered across the Slavic East. One small group, led by a Tzimisce named Elsbetta, has come here. Jorgi now serves as Elsbetta's eyes and ears among the city's nobles in exchange for regular draughts of live-prolonging blood (although his true blood oath to Basilio remains strong). Yet, even he is not permitted into the depths of the caverns that are now inhabited by the Tzimisce and her servants. What the Obertus hope

to accomplish here remains a mystery, but Jorgi has begun to grow nervous at the number of “guests” the Tzimisce have brought below who have never returned — far more than should be required to feed a single Cainite, or even a small brood...

Poland

Much of the area occupied by the Polish principalities is lowland, particularly in the heart of what was once unified Poland. Unlike its eastern neighbors, the Polish land consists largely of flatlands or gently rolling plains, becoming mountainous only in the south. There, those plains eventually meet the Carpathian Mountains, which in turn give way to the Tatra Mountains that mark the borders of Polish domain. The Vistula, the largest river in Poland, flows from the Carpathian Mountains across most of the nation, eventually emptying out into the Baltic Sea. Along with the Oder River, it marks the boundaries of the Polish plains.

Much of Poland is forested. Many villages dot the available flatlands, but the soil here is poorer than in nearby nations, and subsistence is often a struggle. The nation was once divided into two distinct provinces — Wielkspolska (Greater Poland) and Malopolska (Lesser Poland) — but with the disintegration of Poland as a unified state, these distinctions no longer have much meaning. Winters and summers can reach dangerous extremes, but can also prove to be quite mild. The climate is relatively wet, the winters more so than the summers.

Way of Life

The breakup of the Polish state was largely brought about by King Boleslaw III's attempt to divide the nation among his sons. This act led swiftly to a breakdown of the governing system, and the ousting of his eldest son, Duke Vladislav, in 1146. By 1230, a unified Poland is little more than a memory. No longer a recognizable nation, Poland consists of numerous independent principalities, each ruled over by its own landowner, baron or *voivode* — and by its own Cainite prince, of course. The Teutonic Knights have arrived, answering Duke Konrad of Mazovia's call for aid against the pagan Prussians threatening his border. The knights have already claimed portions of the land as their own, and the immediate area is becoming little more than a staging ground for their coming invasion of Prussia. As of yet, however, this little impacts the remainder of the Polish principalities.

The feudal system in Poland has begun to change over the past decades. Few serfs remain, as most landowners have found it more profitable to employ free farmers to work their lands. Guaranteed fixed rents on land, many settlers from the west, have established their own communities. These villages, be they Polish or foreign, are not quite as grim as those in lands east. Farmers in Poland require more land than their Hungarian or Bulgarian counterparts, because the soil in any given area is often less fertile. This, combined with Poland's lesser quantity of mountains and forests combine to encourage Polish villages to spread out more than their counterparts. Some villagers work in the mines that, though less rich than those of Hungary, nevertheless add substantial wealth to the coffers of local landholders. When it was a unified state, many of Poland's villages were "service villages"—communities of craftsmen who lived just outside a lord's holdings and made their living providing for his household's needs. Though this system has broken down, several of these service villages remain, communities in which a vast majority of the populace survive entirely by selling goods and services to a local nobleman (or, perhaps, local Cainites).

The territories boast several larger cities such as Krakow, Poland's former capital, many of which are growing rapidly due to increased trade with the west.

In the eyes of westerners, the people of Poland are less backward than their neighbors. While the vampire lord (usually but not universally Tzimisce) of any given province regularly preys upon the populace of her domain, Cainite activity in Poland (Krakow excepted) is less intensive than in other regions, perhaps because the tiny provinces do not seem worth their attention. Therefore, the Poles find the nights less terrifying. They are not so superstitious, nor do they rush so desperately to be inside before the sun has set. Trade with the west is quite common, even in smaller communities.

For their own part, the Polish lords and nobility seem equally divided between two different sorts. Some of them spend much of their time mourning the loss of past glories and dreaming of a newly reunited Poland which will once again leave its mark on the European countryside. Others, however, are perfectly happy with their autonomy, preferring unregulated power over a small domain to the necessity of answering to the king of a larger territory. Many of this latter sort become true despots, and the mortal terror they inspire in those unfortunate enough to dwell in their domains is more than enough to make up for any dearth of supernatural danger in the region.

Poland is largely a Catholic nation, and, as elsewhere, differences of religion cause a substantial



amount of unrest. The local pagan tribes were officially Christianized in the late 10th century, but even tonight, many of Poland's citizens worship gods in hidden temples or sealed rooms that they would never admit to their parish priest. Jews are tolerated in many communities, and their numbers are rising as many of them flee to Poland to escape persecution in Western Europe, but an anti-Semitic attitude is growing more prevalent throughout the principalities. As with so many nations, the Jews of Poland are forced to live in ghettos, away from their Christian neighbors.

Krakow

Located in the southern regions of the former Polish state — specifically in what was Malopolska — Krakow has become a cosmopolitan center of commerce and learning (or what passes for such in 1230), despite the collapse of the nation around it. Many of Krakow's citizens and nobility, Cainite and kine, still think of their city as the capital of Poland, despite the fact that Poland is no longer a nation, and that Duke Casimir, the last obvious claimant to the Polish crown, died over three decades ago. Local pride, a relatively foreign concept to much of Eastern Europe, is alive and well here, as citizens celebrate their city's culture and history, and its nobles dream of glories lost.

The city of Krakow was constructed alongside the Vistula River in the 10th century, though legend states that a small village existed on the spot earlier still, and was terrorized by a dragon until a cobbler named Krak found a way to kill it by tricking it into consuming a mixture of sulfur and salt. The city has long been a stronghold of Catholicism, and became a bishopric at the turn of the millennium; nevertheless, a great many followers of the old Slavic ways live within its high defensive walls. In addition, the city boasts the Collegium Maius, an institution of learning that is known throughout Europe. Though largely distrusted by the populace and the nobility, the city's Jews — allowed to remain for their knowledge and learning — dwell in a ghetto just outside the so-called "University Quarter."

They are not alone. Dwelling in their midst, his haven beneath the city's synagogue, is a Cainite by the name of Yitzhak ben Avraham. This Jewish ashen rabbi of the Road of Heaven seeks nothing less than the reestablishment of a Polish state — and furthermore, he seeks to establish within it a new Jewish homeland.

In the south of Krakow is Wawel Hill, atop which stand both Wawel Castle and its adjoining

cathedral. Wawel Castle is the ancestral home of the ruling Piast family. The current duke, Leszek I, has accomplished little during his reign, spending most of his time in battle — both politically and literally — against other claimants to his title. The Prince of Krakow, the Tzimisce Razkoljna, lies in torpor in a cave within the hill. A mere three years ago, Razkoljna was assaulted by a coterie of Furores, so her own childer now watch over her as she recovers from her injuries. Her absence has allowed Yitzhak to begin expanding his own base of power.

Not far from Yitzhak's haven, the Tremere Claas Drescher dwells in the cellar of an apothecary's shop. Currently struggling to found a hidden chantry in this Tzimisce-held city, Drescher has been unable to take full advantage of Razkoljna's absence. His Ventruer ally and countryman, Konrad von Aupfholm, has been murdered, his ashes left clinging to the wall of an alleyway amidst some form of yellow ichor. So far, Drescher has been unable to determine who — or what — slew his comrade, but at least two other Cainites have met Final Death under similar circumstances, and the Tremere is growing alarmed.

The Russian Principalities

The region once known as Kievan Rus lies roughly in the geographical center of Europe. Only the very border regions are mountainous; the rest of the territory alternates between gently rolling lowlands and more level highlands. The northern reaches of the region are occupied by the Pripet Marshes, a relatively large swampland. The Dneiper River runs through the region, linking the Baltic Sea with the Empire of Byzantium. The region's position between the Black and Baltic Seas, and along major waterborne and overland trade routes makes it a center of commerce for Eastern Europe. The land itself is fertile and excellent for farming. The woodlands are full of game (and host the occasional Feral Cainite as well as packs of Lupines), and the climate of the region is temperate, even mild.

Way of Life

Like Poland, what was once the semi-unified region of Kievan Rus has degenerated into a warring mass of independent pseudo-states. The Russian principalities are, if anything, even less cohesive than the Polish territories, for they have already had a foretaste of the terror that will soon sweep in from the east. In 1169, already suffering social and financial decline thanks to shifting patterns of trade

routes brought about partly by the Crusades, “Golden Kiev” was sacked and plundered by Prince Andrey Bogolyubov of Suzdal. In 1203, a similar raid, launched by Roman Mstislavich of Galicia, unraveled much of the progress they’d made toward recovery. Only in the following decades had Kiev managed to pick up some of the pieces, to make the city great again, though it had already lost its preeminent position in the area to the city of Novgorod. Then, in 1222, the city was attacked again, this time by Subetai and Jebe, generals of Genghis Khan’s Golden Horde. Although the true Mongol invasion is still several years distant in 1230, this prelude of things to come has driven the final nail in Kiev’s coffin. The city will persevere, will even regain its position as a center of commerce, but it will never again recapture the glory it once possessed.

Most of the area’s income derives from trade in woodland products and artistic goods (along with some mining endeavors). It is an economy in which the vast majority of the populace does not participate at all, as craftsmen employed by the *boyars* produce the majority of such crafts. Though those *boyars* own most of the farmland, they have little interest in the day-to-day affairs of their subjects, and they receive little in the way of income from them. Most villages, then, pay little heed to the nobility and are entirely self-sustaining. They consist largely of sprawling farms, and hunting provides a greater portion of the local diet than it does in other regions. Only in the cities such as Kiev and Novgorod does anything resembling a traditional feudal system exist. In these places, the citizenry find themselves more impoverished than they once were; goods and services bring lower prices, and trade with other nations, while substantial, cannot equal its past heights.

Most of the Russian principalities remain largely Orthodox by faith, though many Catholics, Muslims, pagans and Jews can be found in Kiev and other centers of trade. The churches of the region are still quite active, as most of the populace pray for a reversal of fortune, and for protection against the foreign influences (and other, less mundane dangers) that have grown in the time since the collapse of Kievan Rus.

In the past handful of years, rumors have spread that suggest that a powerful Gangrel has appeared in Russia and come to an accord with the local Tremere. The Tzimisce have made a concerted effort to investigate the validity of these claims, so far with little success. If this is true, the Fiends have reason to fear. The Omen War has remained largely a stalemate even with vari-

ous clans — such as the Gangrel — working against the Tremere. Should even a small number of Gangrel shift their allegiance to the Warlocks, the Tzimisce may find themselves on the losing side of the war. As such, the Tzimisce of the region have begun reaching out to other clans, seeking to make alliances where there were none before, in order to bolster their own strength against this alarming turn of events. Outsiders have the opportunity to earn substantial boons from the Russian Tzimisce, if only they are willing to stand with them against a common foe.

Kiev

Kiev has stood on the wooded west bank of the Dneiper since the late fifth century, well before there was anything resembling a Russian state. Positioned perfectly as a trading center, the city has prospered throughout its recorded history — until now. The city itself, behind its battered walls and shattered golden gate, is subdivided into three districts. Formerly the richest part of the city, Upper Town has grown sullied and decrepit during these long years of hardship. Few

FAMILY RESEMBLANCE

Legend among the Cainites of the Slavic East has it that the Nosferatu who run the forests of the region are the childer of Baba Yaga, wreaking havoc wherever they go.

A convenient legend, if one happens to be Nosferatu.

Rasputin Simyonov leads his coterie of Nosferatu on murderous raids across the length and breadth of the former Kievan territories. Mortals are stripped of their valuables, their blood and their very lives, and even lone Cainite travelers have fallen to Simyonov’s rampages. Few of the local vampires are willing to stand up to the marauders or to hunt them down, for fear of drawing the wrath of Simyonov’s sire.

Actually, Simyonov’s sire was a befuddled Nosferatu who lurked in the alleys of Novgorod and died years ago at the fangs of his child. Rasputin wouldn’t know Baba Yaga from the Virgin Mary. He’s simply an opportunist who recognized a good thing when he stumbled onto it.

Of course, there may be *true* childer of Baba Yaga abroad in the night, and sooner or later one of them might just take offense at Simyonov’s little game...

of its ornate structures remain, and what was once the home of the city's clergy and nobility is now a warren of poverty and crime. The only bit of Upper Town's faded past that remains is Saint Sophia Cathedral, an old church bedecked with silver and gold and exquisite mosaics. The cathedral managed to escape looting during the raids on Kiev only through the efforts of the pagan Tzimisce Darvag Grozny, who has sworn to tear down the church himself and is not about to let some pitiful band of kine beat him to it. Grozny is the closest thing Kiev has to a Cainite prince, though he has no interest in such titles.

Kiev's Lower Town, or Podil, is traditionally the home of Kiev's artisans and craftsmen, and it still boasts a number of the city's remaining merchants. It is also, however, the lair of enough thieves, bandits, pirates, cutthroats, slavers and whores to make even Upper Town's criminal element look sedate. Citizens in Lower Town lock their doors and windows at night, and not out of any fear of vampires. Rumors among the Cainite population place a small cell of Prometheans here, but Grozny's fanaticism about defending "his" city from other Cainites makes this an unlikely proposition.

The third district, Pechersk, is Kiev's religious center, and it is occupied almost entirely by a series of churches and monasteries. One, the Monastery of the Caves (named thus because it is, quite literally, carved into the earth), has remained relatively untouched during Kiev's various sacks, a fact that has drawn the attention of those who prefer to keep their presence both secret and safe. A small cell of Obertus have set up a library and monastery of their own in the lower levels, protected by several monks who have been inducted into the order. The leader of these Obertus, Mother Miska, is an Obertus revenant. None of the Obertus here are vampires, which may be why Grozny has chosen to leave them alone (though he may simply remain ignorant of their presence; the pagan Cainite spends little time in this part of town).

Notable Cainites

Bela Rusenko, Prince of Sofia

7th-generation Cappadocian, childe of Amalia of Thrace, walker on the Road of Sin

Nature: Rogue

Demeanor: Autocrat

Embrace: AD 1044

Apparent Age: early 40s

Amalia of Thrace long believed she was eternally damned, well before she encountered the Bogomil priest Father Patryn. Many of her long years of unlife were spent alone, but her need for companionship overcame her better instincts at times and drove her to drag another into the darkness with her.

One such victim was Bela Rusenko, a Hungarian scribe. Born and raised in Buda-Pest, Bela knew little of the world beyond his city. He grew up well educated, however, for his uncle was a Catholic priest, and his knowledge of things esoteric and spiritual was impressive. Amalia met Bela during midnight mass, and he quickly impressed her as a worthwhile companion. For his own part, Bela's faith in Catholicism was not as strong as his knowledge of the religion, and he took quickly to the life of the "damned." The opportunities for learning far outweighed, in his mind, the prospect of eternal damnation by a God he wasn't even sure he acknowledged.

During their travels, Bela learned a great deal of the world — and Amalia learned more than she wanted to about her companion. Bela quickly began to revel in his newfound immortality, not the sort of reaction of which his penitent sire approved. Despite a mutual blood oath (which has long since faded by



1230), it took barely 50 years for them to go their separate ways, Amalia returning to her home in Bulgaria, Bela to the wilds of Transylvania.

It was here that Bela began to learn of the strange powers that dwelt in the land beyond the forest, and his mind began to turn down dangerous paths. Surely, if there were things greater even than the Children of Caine hidden in the night, they must have access to knowledge that the vampires did not. Bela found himself caught up in several cults, always seeking a being of power from which he might beg enlightenment. He found, instead, the “god” Havnor — the Malkavian prophet Octavio. And from Octavio, he learned of the demon Kupala.

Bela spent many years studying at Octavio’s feet, and he has gleaned “the truth” from the mad Cainite’s ramblings. Octavio’s task is not to *thwart* Kupala; it is to *become* Kupala, granting the demon-god a new form in the physical world. Since the Malkavian is clearly neither stable enough for the task, nor worthy of the knowledge and power such a transformation would bestow upon him, however, it falls to someone else to become the demon’s host.

Bela departed Transylvania, partially to get away from Octavio’s cult and partially because he believes that the magics of the land are part of what keeps Kupala bound. Using contacts and allies formed during his travels with his sire, and taking advantage of the chaos as the Tzimisce of the region warred one with another, he was able to step easily into the void left by the departure of Basilio the Elder and become Prince of Sofia. To the Cainites of Bulgaria, Bela is a driven and commanding — yet ultimately mundane — prince, made unusual only because his clan is not known for holding such positions.

Behind closed doors, Bela conducts rituals that would make even Geza Arpad cringe. He moves slowly, cautiously, not wishing any of the local Cainites to discover his plans. His intention is to summon Kupala bodily to Sofia, where Bela will become a new host and incarnation for the demon. In an ironic echo of the mad dreams of the Toreador Michael, he intends to sacrifice a portion of his city — any Cainites therein, in fact — to do it.

It will be some years yet, before his plans come to fruition (if they ever do at all). With any luck, he won’t survive long enough to implement his mad scheme. Amalia and Father Patryn have the new prince very near the top of their list of vampires who must be “purified.”

Yitzhak ben Abraham,

Ashen Rabbi of Krakow

6th-generation Brujah, childe of Natasia, walker on the Road of Heaven

Nature: Penitent

Demeanor: Fanatic

Embrace: AD 1111

Apparent Age: mid 30s

Yitzhak Reuben was born in the city of Prague, the only child of Rabbi Ariel Reuben and his wife, Sarah, and his childhood was a time of relative comfort. His family was not particularly affluent, but neither did it starve. Yitzhak was educated, as were many of the Jews of that region, and he was fully fluent and literate in German, Hungarian, Slavonic (western dialect) and Hebrew by the time he was 12. When he was 17, his entire extended family left Prague, concerned with the growing enforced isolation of the Jewish Quarter. They settled in Krakow, where the Jews were somewhat more widely tolerated. Yitzhak began working as a silversmith. Although his first devotion was still to his studies, and he was devout in his faith, he did not feel that he had the temperament to follow in his father’s footsteps and become a rabbi.

When his father died, 10 years later, Sarah sat shiv’a, a Jewish custom in which the mourning family receives visitors for seven days, so that they might express their condolences. Yitzhak was absolutely shocked to see a woman he knew as a local prostitute — and had heretofore avoided — show up the first evening to express her regrets!

The woman’s name, it turned out, was Natasia, and she had been a frequent visitor of Ariel Reuben — not in the way Yitzhak had at first feared, but simply as a companion. The dark-haired woman was quite intelligent and well versed in all manner of esoteric subjects. Yitzhak soon found himself doing as his father had done: meeting with the woman regularly for nothing more improper than deep conversation. That these meetings only took place after dark never bothered him.

After several years of this unusual friendship, Natasia explained her true nature to Yitzhak. He was horrified — not that Natasia was some inhuman creature, but that anyone should have to exist as she did. His response to her undead state was one of sympathy and caring. It had been years — since well before her Embrace, in fact — since any other man save Yitzhak’s father had treated Natasia as an equal.



It was a reaction entirely unlike any she'd ever experienced, and Natasia decided instantly that Yitzhak's unique (in her experience) kindness must be preserved. He did not hate her for what she did, for he knew that in her mind she had given him a great gift — but still Yitzhak could not accept what he had become. Nights after his Embrace, Yitzhak left home, never to see his family again.

Over the following decades, the Brujah wandered Eastern Europe. He learned many things about both Cainite and mortal society. He saw how his people, the Jews, were treated throughout the land. He saw how many of the vampires, marked as different by clan or even by age, were downtrodden as well.

And slowly, Yitzhak began to understand his place in God's plan.

Now calling himself Yitzhak ben Avraham ("Isaac, son of Abraham," a reference to the Old Testament), he has returned to Krakow, a devout follower and ashen rabbi of the Road of Heaven, and he is on nothing less than a holy quest. God did not mean for man to raise arms against man, nor vampire against vampire. Jew, Christian, Muslim, Brujah, Ventrue, Nosferatu: All are God's children.

He would start with Poland, then. Yitzhak's dream is of a united Poland — one mortal government by day, one Cainite law in the shadows. Furthermore, this new Poland should be a refuge for his own people, a homeland where the Jews might be safe and welcomed until the world becomes a more hospitable place. It is an ambitious goal — especially as it is but the first step toward a larger unity — but surely God intended him for nothing less. Otherwise, why grant him the gift of immortality?

Tonight, Yitzhak prefers to work through intermediaries, not out of fear of discovery by the other powerful Cainites of the region, but because he fears his own temper. Naturally calm, Yitzhak has come to dread the outbursts of violence brought about by his Brujah blood, and he prefers to avoid developing many close attachments for fear of harming those he cares about. For all his easygoing nature and love of peace, however, Yitzhak has no compunctions about defending himself or his objectives with violence. He has already developed a small but strong following among the walkers on the Road of Heaven, and he is quickly becoming a true power in the region.





CHAPTER SEVEN: SCANDINAVIA AND THE BALTICS

“Nobles! Our enemy is a foreigner, begirt with the arms and the wealth of almost all the West; let us, by endeavouring to defer the battle for our profit, make him a prey to famine, which is all inward malady; and he will find it very hard to conquer a peril among his own people.”

—Saxo Grammaticus

Few Cainites dare venture into the lands outside civilized Europe. Unspeakable things lurk here, and strange vampires hunt for blood. To the east lie Prussia and the pagan lands of the Baltic, to the west Denmark, and Sweden and Norway lie to the north. Some Cainites have made these countries their homes, either by adapting to the ways of the north or by bringing their ways with them. Whatever the case, the northlands are harsh, demanding and unforgiving, and no being holds the power to bring them under sway.

MORTALS

Valdemar II — King of Denmark. Troubled yet ambitious regent of a state in decline. Valdemar inherited the throne from his brother, Canute, but he is lacking the tutelage of the Archbishop Absalon, which both his brother and father had before him. He is ruthless toward pagans and desperate to maintain his power. Since 1227, his power has slipped after decades of glory.

Haakon IV Haakonson — King of Norway. Determined ruler with a penchant for culture and civilization. Haakon is troubled by the local kin strife of his country, but he is looking to expand the Norwegian commonwealth both in terms of political and real power.

Canute Holmgerisson — King of Sweden. Canute rules in an extremely turbulent time, trying to hold together the young nation without yet having gained the stability of a feudal state. Religious matters also trouble the king, who is frantically seeking advisors to help him stabilize the country.

Albert — Bishop of Riga. Leader of the Brethren of the Sword, a relentless man with a taste for riches, power and vitae. His lust for the blood of Cainites is growing somewhat noticeable, and some of the Brethren have started to worry about their leader.

Mindaugas — King of Lithuania. A ruthless man who does not let anything stand in the way of his path to greater power, be that exiling his family or murdering his consorts.

Scandinavia

Centuries have come and gone since last the cries of despair following the coming of the longboats of the Vikings faded. An era of mayhem and destruction has passed, the Viking kingdoms lie shattered, the longboats have sunk, and the words of the All-High are but echoes of the past.

The Vikings brought their culture across most of Northern Europe, and even as far east as Constantinople, spreading terror wherever they chose to raid. Perhaps this has been a contributing factor

CAINITES

Rosenkrantz the Elder — (6th-generation Ventrue) Contender to the title of prince in Bergen. Holds influences within the Norwegian royal court.

Ambrosio Vitalis — (10th-generation Lasombra) A monk and chronicler, currently on his way through Scandinavia in 1230.

Absalon — (7th-generation Nosferatu) Previously exerted influence over the Archbishop of Lund, now a contender for principedom of Copenhagen. Designer of the Treaty of Arkona.

Fortinbras — (8th-generation Ventrue) Self-proclaimed Prince of Copenhagen, breaker of the Treaty of Arkona. Labors to remain Prince despite a lapse in power as the Treaty was broken.

Herman Radov — (8th-generation Ventrue) Prince of Bergen, struggling to maintain his power while other Cainites strive to relieve him of it.

Erland — (9th-generation Brujah) Prince of Gotland. Brooding, proud Brujah who struggles to maintain his power.

Werter — (7th-generation Gangrel) Nominal Cainite leader of Uppsala. Wotanist (Odin worshipper) who denounces Christianity. Believes the Methuselah All-High to be the progenitor of his lineage, and not Caine, as do many other Wotanist Gangrel.

Eirik Longtooth — (10th-generation Gangrel) Legendary *einherjar* outlaw. Vehemently anti-Christian, he labors to damage the religion wherever he can.

Lord Horst de Novara — (9th-generation Ventrue) Merchant sponsor of campaigns in Livonia and Prussia. Wishes to gain control over Albert, Bishop of Riga, and other key individuals.

Tengael — (7th-generation Gangrel) Coven leader of a pack of Prussian Gangrel struggling against the German invasion. She carries on the Prussian legacy even after her culture has been assimilated by the conqueror Germans.

to the general belief that Scandinavia is a cold and dangerous land where certain death awaits the unwary traveler.

Today, though, there is but little evidence of the brutal days of yore. Most Scandinavians are God-fearing Christians, commoners and nobles alike. That is not to say, however, that there are not those who oppose Christianity in these lands. Some would see the lands and the people reverted to the old ways.

Comprising the three kingdoms of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, Scandinavia spans the North Sea and encompasses the western banks of the Baltic Sea, bordering both Russia and the Holy Roman Empire.

Denmark

Denmark borders the Holy Roman Empire and is not attached to the Scandinavian peninsula. It sits on its own peninsula surrounded by the islands that constitute the kingdom. Thought in the past to be as fierce and barbaric as their northern cousins, Denmark is now a civil and devotedly Christian nation. Nevertheless, the Danes carry a reputation of being relentless and impatient, but the Danish views on etiquette and government have grown quite advanced. Many Scions find an ideal home here, relishing the chance to direct the burgeoning methods of government.

The Valdemar Era

The past century has been a prosperous one for Denmark, beginning with the rule of Valdemar I in AD 1157. After a brutal and devastating period of civil wars, Valdemar took power with blade in hand. Valdemar's minister, his foster-brother Absalon, Archbishop of Lund, was ever at his side, as were most of the other bishops, (who were well under Absalon's influence — those who resisted were exiled). Absalon founded Copenhagen in 1167 as a trading center, and he is generally considered responsible for most of Valdemar's achievements.

The last few centuries saw some changes in Danish rule. A blood feud in the royal house resulted in a series of murders and contests for the throne, until Valdemar seized the throne in 1157, with the help of his foster-brother. Their rule was not as bloody as their means of attaining it, though. Together they reorganized the government, re-established the national monetary units and finally rid Denmark of the bands of marauders that had plagued his lands. The most important battle was the capture of the castle Arkona, on the island of Rügen in 1169. Ab-



salon led the attack himself, conquering the Slavic Wends, destroying their great temple to the pagan god Svantevit. Absalon's motives for personally leading the attack were unknown.

With Absalon at his ear, Valdemar also acknowledged the Holy Roman Emperor as overlord of Denmark, thereby ensuring a peaceful relationship with the empire, allowing him to focus solely on the rebuilding and restructuring of the country without fear of attack from the south. Under Absalon's guiding hand, Valdemar's son Canute IV liberated Denmark from the Empire in 1184, ensuring the title of national hero for the son as well as the father.

Following Canute was his brother, the current king, Valdemar II. After he attained the crown in 1202, Valdemar II decided to expand south and captured Holstein and the city of Hamburg. Further conquests include Pomerania and Mecklenburg, and Valdemar II's nation was established as one of the great European powers. Valdemar conquered Estonia in 1219 and claimed that a standard, Dannebrog, fell from the sky during the battle and helped ensure victory. With his victory well in hand, Valdemar erected a castle at the site, known as Reval.

In 1223 a civil war erupted, as several German nobles under Danish dominion rebelled. Valdemar II and his oldest son were captured by Germans and held hostage for more than two years. Valdemar was finally released after agreeing to a huge ransom, and he gave up most of his German provinces. He attempted to win back his lost territories, but he was defeated by the combined forces of German princes, including

Count Adolf IV of Schauenburg as well as the citizens of Hamburg, at the battle of Bornhöved.

Losing much of his provincial strength and struggling to maintain authority over his nobles, Valdemar turned to strengthening the central government and devising new laws during the remainder of his reign. In 1230, Denmark is at somewhat of a juncture, on the way to decline after a glorious century, as Valdemar has lost most of his power and now reigns over a peninsula in turmoil. Despite his attempts to instigate reforms of state, the nobles under the Danish crown are hungry for power, and many whisper of coming civil wars.

Cainites in 13th-Century Denmark

Denmark is a great European power in decline. In darkened halls, Scions meet in hopes of finding some way to stop the decline and bring Denmark back to its glory. In the throne room, Valdemar II and his advisors desperately seek the same, while still attempting to maintain a mask of decency and nobility.

The Cainites of Denmark, as elsewhere in Europe, hold little real influence over the royal court. Instead, some Ventrue act as councilors and political advisors to more prominent nobles. Several Brujah serve as scholars and military advisors to the court, but they do not wield any true power. (A side note: At this point, nobles, officers and clergy were exempt from paying taxes, something from which Cainites with their fingers in Danish trade prospered.) Among the Low Clans, Gangrel and some Malkavians make Denmark their home, but the country is quite small, and it won't support too many predators.

The Cainites of Denmark maintained a shaky peace for a time through an accord known as the Treaty of Arkona. Members of both High and Low Clans, chiefly Brujah and Gangrel, respectively, were present before the Ventrue turned their eyes toward the country, and were at war with each other. Some Tremere also haunted the pagan Wends on Rügen, and Absalon the Nosferatu knew this. Before his namesake's campaign against Arkona, he approached the native Cainites as well as the newly arrived Ventrue and called for an accord of peace among the clans, so that all might prosper from the pending feudal system. The Treaty of Arkona saw the Brujah and Ventrue aid Valdemar's men against the Wendic Tremere, scattering their forces and crushing the chantry at Arkona. But Absalon

THE TRUSTED ADVISOR

Absalon of Lund held a great deal of influence over mortal leaders and followed his own rather strange agendas. This might raise the speculation that Absalon is (or was) a vampire, which is true after a fashion.

Absalon of Lund was a mortal man. Just as he whispered into the ear of the king, though, so another whispered into his own. When Valdemar claimed the throne, a Cainite of Clan Nosferatu gained the ear of Absalon of Lund. Known only by the name of his pawn, he has plotted his own course through Danish history. He rarely exercises direct influence on the affairs of state. It seems the Nosferatu Absalon mainly milked his namesake for information so that he could manipulate Cainite affairs in Denmark, perhaps suggesting this and that on the odd occasion.



did not demolish the castle. Instead he let it stand, protected, and explored its wonders.

The Wendic Tremere evidently worshipped a dark, pagan god known as Svantevit, of which little is known, save in the secrecy of their chantry at Rügen. Absalon discovered that the Wendic Tremere were attempting to restore the god with their vampiric blood. He immediately saw the potential in such a potent ritual. If a ritual could resurrect the remains of a god, then perhaps even a Cainite could undergo it. What the outcome of the completion of such a ritual would be, no one could know, but Absalon was certainly willing to test it, were he to obtain it. To date, however, the ritual remains incomplete, although Absalon continues to search.

The Treaty of Arkona ensured that the Cainites of Denmark reaped all the benefits of the state and dwelled peacefully side by side. The Cainites who had fought here for centuries found this difficult, but the nights were peaceful in Denmark for a time. Under the Treaty of Arkona, no Cainite could claim the title of "prince" in Denmark; the Nosferatu Absalon served as chancellor for Cainite

affairs. In 1201, however, the mortal Archbishop Absalon died, and the Nosferatu lost much of his power. The leader of the Ventrue contingent in Copenhagen, a Scion named Frederick, declared the treaty broken and instituted himself as prince of that city. Others followed his example, and soon the peace under the treaty was but a memory. While some vampires still attempt to observe the rules of the treaty (which had other provisions for peace; the prohibition against claiming principedom was simply the most important), most laugh at the failed experiment. Adherents of the Cainite Heresy take offense to the treaty, as it seems to them to contradict the Second Tradition.

Breaking the treaty proved to be Frederick's own undoing as he was murdered soon thereafter. (Suspicion naturally fell on Absalon, but nothing has yet been proven.) Several princes followed him, before the relatively stable court of Fortinbras, which has lasted intact since 1224. Absalon the Nosferatu still wishes to retake "his" nation, however, and the Cainites of Denmark have not seen the last of him.

Mortals in 13th-Century Denmark

In recent years, Denmark has lost much of the power and influence it held over the last century. In its heyday, it virtually controlled the Baltic Sea, and towns as far south as Lübeck paid homage to Valdemar II.

During the 13th century, the population of Denmark grew to approximately 250,000, which resulted in the clearing of forests and the establishment of many new rural towns. Through the newly settled areas, a system of municipal council government formed, as did the trade of goods. This resulted in the Nordic-Slav trade centers of furs, slaves and other luxury items in Schleswig and Gotland being replaced by this new trade, based around Lübeck and other Northern German towns, including Copenhagen ("trade-haven").

As Danish foreign politics expanded, the crown depended greatly on support from a burgeoning aristocracy and clergy. This aristocracy was exempt from paying taxes, and it constantly attained more lands. Previously, it had been customary for the peasantry to provide local lords with soldiers in the event of a military campaign, but this tradition was recently discarded in favor of a professional cavalry in the employment of nobles. This resulted in the introduction of taxes instead of fulfilling public duty by soldiering. In addition, peasants now leased land from feudal lords instead of owning it themselves, further oppressing the commoners.

In the larger towns and cities, guilds and leagues were established, advocating many laws that protected traders and merchants as well as artisans and other vocations, and trade prospered in Denmark. The nobility is growing greedy from the freedom and leeway they were given, however, and demands more from the king. This becomes the direct reason for the dissolution of the kingdom some 10 years in the future.

Life for the common man in Denmark is hard. Although the lands of the Danish isles are very fertile, the yoke of tax and pressure from the nobility still hovers above their heads. The nights of Denmark are unsafe, as vampires seek to use the trade routes for their own purposes, and the residents of newer villages complain of the howls of wolves growing ever closer to their homes.

Norway

North of Denmark lies Norway. From this craggy coastline of fjords and ice came the Vikings, spreading

terror and mayhem throughout the known world. But that age of murder and destruction is past. Norway is now a Christian nation under one king, instead of a land of pagan tribes under many chiefs.

Norwegians were said to be huge, brutish and grim characters, frostbitten and weather-stained with wild, long hair and beards and a taste for blood. And certainly, the extreme frost makes a man grim and silent and wears on his patience, but the southern end of Norway is quite a bit more temperate than most people would assume. Warm summers with plenty of rain give good crops, and the North Atlantic Current provides ice-free ports along most of the coast. But Norway is not a small country, and much of the terrain is rough and hostile. Traveling takes time, and people live where natural resources exist to support them, creating small, isolated communities by coast or mountain. Unlike Denmark, which is rather flat, Norway is made up of mountain ranges dividing the country down the middle, with fertile lands to the southeast and southwest, and fjords along the entire coast. The deep forests are home to all manner of game, but also to bloodcurdling horrors. Tales speak of the *vargr*, werewolves and other night-creatures hungering for Christian blood.

Understandably, the most important communities have arisen around trading centers. To the west lies the capital Bjórgvin (Bergen), with sea access to all of Europe. To the south lies Oslo, and in the middle of the country lies Nidaros (Trondheim) with the only cathedral in the country, the magnificent Nidaros Dome, where the saint-king Olav the Holy is buried. Pilgrims from across Christendom visits his burial site, where the man who brought Christianity to Norway is said to lie complete in his shrine, without a trace of decomposition.

An Age of Cultural Enlightenment

The current king is Haakon Haakonson, one of the most legendary Norwegian rulers. His renown was assured when he was an infant. With assassins on their heels, a group of men called Birkebeinerene, ("the birch-feet," so called because they had nothing on their feet but shoes made from the skin of birch, and skis) carried him halfway across the country at mid-winter. No king before ruled for as long as Haakon, who rules from 1217 to 1263. During his reign, Norway changes dramatically in cultural terms, as his court encourages and nurtures the bardic arts, architecture, music and crafts, among other things. Through strong cultural influence from the continent, the people in general and the nobility in particular

were greatly enlightened. Society was in many ways pacified and civilized under Haakon.

Cainites in 13th-Century Norway

The mortals of Norway may have united and found culture, but the Cainites certainly have not. To the north roam the Gangrel, growing stranger and more bestial as the climate grows more inhospitable, having been driven northward by the coming of the High Clans. Ventrue, Brujah, Lasombra and Toreador, most of whom have arrived during the last century, dominate the southern coast.

The different clans support different factions, as they did during the civil wars, to gain power. So far the Lasombra are paying a high price for having sided with the deeply religious Bagler-clan in Bergen, which was instrumental in the conflict against the coronation of Haakon Haakonson. Now this group has been shattered, and the Lasombra have lost a valuable tool. The Ventrue and Brujah conduct

trade from the continent, knowing they do so on borrowed time, as they fear the Gangrel will try to reclaim the country.

The Prince of Bergen up until 1204 was the Lasombra Almaric Treveylan, but with the defeat of the Bagler-clan, Treveylan was overthrown. The current prince is the Ventrue Herman Radv. Other Cainites wish to usurp his title, chief among them Rosenkrantz the Elder.

Mortals in 13th-Century Norway

As with the Kingdom of Denmark, this is an era of change for Norway. A period of civil wars starting in the 1130s resulted in the local aristocracies based around family gradually changing into a feudal aristocracy loyal to the king. Over a period of 100 years, a national system of governing developed, marking Norway's definite transformation into a feudal state. Several new laws became standard, especially concerning the right to succession and conduct of affairs both rural and urban.

As the structure of society changed, so did the Norwegian social stratum. Earlier, as in Denmark, farmers owned the land they worked. Now, farmers only lease their fields from the nobility, and they find themselves in the same social class as their former thralls. This has had a major impact on the social order

FATE OF THE EINHERJAR

The dark warriors of Odin from the Viking Era are no more. That is, they have no place in the new feudal system. In the years prior to the unification of Norway, they found it easy to rule the towns and villages around their mead-halls. But as the humans accepted the yoke of the new religion, they shut themselves out from the old ways. The Cainites from Europe advocated Christianity, proclaiming it the One Truth (or at least a convenient excuse for their actions), and drove the *einherjar* back with stakes and torches.

Many joined the Free State of Finland. Some sailed off from the shores of Scandinavia at the end of the Viking Era never to be seen again. Some still wander the northern wastes, fighting with the *vargr* and the Lupines (and sometimes each other). Some lie in torpor beneath holy sites, and some again stalk the night with the lust for revenge boiling in their blood.

The *einherjar* are terrifying, even for vampires. They are cold, their eyes are empty, their attire and beards are stained with dried blood, and they fear nothing in the world save the sun and fire. They are superb warriors, and honorable, but they respect nothing except combat and their father, Odin.

For more information on the *einherjar*, **Wolves of the Sea** offers a plethora of information on the Norse vampires and the Viking culture.

THE FENRIR WARS

For centuries a bloody strife has existed between the Cainites of Clan Gangrel and the Lupines known as the Fenrir. Both claim Scandinavia as their rightful homeland, and neither is willing to let the other stay. To complicate matters further, both claim Uppsala in Sweden to be holy ground. Little is known about these Lupines, other than that they are ferocious warriors and apparently worship the Norse wolf-god Fenris. This would make them enemies of Odin, and sure enough, they seem to harbor a special hatred for the Gangrel Methuselah known as the All-High. The All-High disappeared after a particularly vicious Fenrir attack early in the 1100s, and this disappearance broke much of the *einherjar* power of Uppsala. The All-High's child, Werter, is now the nominal Cainite leader of Uppsala. He refuses to let the continental vampires seize power, but he accepts that the nights of the *einherjar* are over.

Fenris seems to have won this round.

among commoners, creating a whole new general class that comprises most of the rural population.

Sweden

Nestled along the west side of the Baltic Sea, and comprising the other major part of the Scandinavian Peninsula, lies Sweden, benefiting from a bountiful resource for food and water and ports to both Kattegat and the Baltic to the south.

In many ways similar to Norway, the country boasts many deep forests and treacherous mountains. But Sweden is blessed with more fertile land than Norway, and also a more varied terrain. The southern tip is quite flat, green and lush, while the northern wastes are craggy, hostile and dangerous. Lupines roam the forests as well as those wastes, as do the Noiad Gangrel and other horrors, but the south is opulent and rich, taking advantage of hot breezes from the continent and the warm, long Atlantic summers.

The Swedes were able men, both at sea and with the crafts, and they become a Christian people in the middle of the 13th century. Christianity was first introduced in AD 830, by the "Apostle of the North," Ansgar the monk. It was not until the 1100s, however, that all kings of Sweden were Christian. In 1164 Sweden received its own episcopate, in Uppsala, which had been the center of Norse Aesir-worship for centuries. Previously, all of Scandinavia had lain under the Danish episcopate of Lund. Sweden started taking a serious interest in international trade at the same time, but the Hanseatic League usurped much of this potential as it expanded to the south of Sweden.

The latter half of the 12th and the first half of the 13th century sees a struggle for power between the descendants of Sverker the Elder and those of his successor, Erik the Holy. This feud is manifest in the ongoing strife between Gotland and Svealand, the two major regions of southern Sweden. This strife lasts until 1250, when the Danes usurp the power because of the political instability of Sweden. In 1230, Canute Holmgersson (Långe) sits on the throne of Sweden (and remains in power until 1234).

Vampiric Affairs

Uppsala used to be a place of pagan worship, and it was also the stage for most of the old battles between the Gangrel and the Lupines. Both claimed that Scandinavia, and in particular Sweden, was their rightful homeland.

For the most part, this struggle has now ended, as both groups have a new enemy: the Church. But the Gangrel and the Lupines do not fight together, they simply focus their ire in other directions. The war between the werewolves and the native Gangrel may never be settled, but the war against the Church has already been lost.

The Ventrue arrived with the Hanseats. Before this time, there had been very few Ventrue in Sweden. Of the High Clans, the Brujah made up the largest contingent, while the Toreador arrived somewhat later. Among the Low Clans, the Gangrel are obviously the most numerous, although the Malkavians count a few of their number among the Swedes. The vampiric population of Sweden is very low, but it grows with the mortal population in coming centuries.

As of 1230, the Prince of Gotland is Erland of Clan Brujah. The nominal leader of Uppsala is Werter of Clan Gangrel (childe of the All-High himself). Christian Cainites wish to establish a "true" Cainite domain in this important religious region, however, and if the only way to do so is by destroying the pagan relic, so be it.

Mortal Affairs

The commoners' life in Sweden is not the same as in the rest of Scandinavia in this period. A new system approaches to replace many of the old ways, but it has not yet arrived. Instead of the feudal system that has become the norm in Norway and Denmark, the main administrative units are still provinces, each of which has its own *thing* (governing body), lawmen and laws. Interestingly enough, this system will prevail for several decades still.

The conversion of Sweden has apparently succeeded, though. People have cast off the old traditions and embraced the cross of Christ. The road has not been an easy one. Converting a people to another religion when they depend so completely on the old religion (worshipping fertility gods for good crops and the like), is a long, difficult process. At first, the people were allowed to commit *blót* — blood sacrifice, in the name of Christ instead of Odin. This was the same in all of pagan Scandinavia, although some areas kept the old ways longer than others.

Many of the Gangrel will never fully accept the teachings of Christ, nor will the Lupines, who seem to hold some sway over parts of the population.

THE NOIAD

In the far north, where the sun never sleeps during summer, one would not expect vampires to dwell. Some do, however, but they do not think of themselves as Cainites. They are the Noiad.

They dwell among the Samí-folk, the nomadic aborigines of Scandinavia. They follow in the trail of the reindeer and settle where they must. Their flocks of humans protect and transport them during the day, and in the summer the tribe settles down with the caribou protecting their patron Noiad. During winter the *Guovssahas*, northern lights, can often be seen, and the Noiad can interpret these messages from the Samí gods to their people.

These strange vampires, most likely an offshoot of the Gangrel, are extremely different from their brethren. The tribe of Samí offers the Noiad blood and protection during summer, and the Noiad give its flock protection and guidance in return. Some are picked out for elite service by their patron, and they receive a portion of its blood to endure the long travels through the ice. Both the human tribe and the vampires avoid contact with outsiders as much as they can.

The Noiad are a bloodline with a somewhat vague past. As they don't tend to socialize much, it has become somewhat difficult for the few scholarly Cainites who have heard of them to identify their actual origin. In fact, some even hold that the Noiad are *not* Cainites, but some sort of Lupine-like beasts, cursed by God to wander the desolate wastes. Sightings are few, but they often include a ghost-like shape draped in fluttering animal skins.

The truth is that this particular bloodline is much older than the scholars would assume. It came to Europe with the Samí, and may therefore be the first Cainite presence on the continent. The Noiad learned to adapt with their herds, and they have evolved into beings so alien and unfamiliar that they are scarcely comparable to their western cousins.

The Noiad are not really suited to be characters for players. They stay close to their mortal charges and aid them in herding reindeer, and they often remain in torpor for the better part of year. Western Cainites, however, might find it necessary or desirable to seek out the Noiad for a number of reasons. Feral Cainites might wish to learn from these hunters, as might the Prodigals, ironically enough. Rumors about the Noiad might reach vampiric scholars at any of Europe's universities, and those rumors are strange indeed. Some state that this ethereal tribe of quasi-vampires is guarding something beneath the frozen wastes, while others state that they have access to a form of blood magic that puts the Tremere to shame. Whatever the truth is, even finding one of the Noiad, much less finding a common tongue and conversing, would be a nigh-Herculean task.



The Free State

As the Christian beliefs moved into Scandinavia backed by continental Cainites, the old *einherjar* of Viking Scandinavia found themselves facing an almost invincible enemy. Although the followers of All-High were superlative warriors to all accounts, the Christians were many, and they were as strong in their faith as the *einherjar* were in battle.

Refusing to lose all to the followers of the White Christ, a group of *einherjar* sought haven in pagan Finland, where they could continue the old ways and oppose, or potentially outlive, the Christians. Legends claim that dozens of *einherjar* set sail for Finland, and that they brought over a hundred mortals with them to their pagan enclave. The longboats left the coasts of Norway and Sweden, brashly claiming to set course for Greenland, but instead they sank their boats and walked across the mountains and into Finland, in secrecy.

Deep in the wilderness of the Land of Ten Thousand Lakes they set up a collective, fashioned in the true, Norse democratic style, heavily guarded and hidden from anyone not welcome. It took some time to establish the society properly, weathering attacks by Lupines and with the *einherjar* in torpor for three months a year, but everything seemed fairly stable toward the end of the 11th century.

The originator of the Free State, the visionary Toreador Karl the Blue, created the commune to preserve his beloved Norse culture, unwilling to stand by and watch it burn at the hands of the Christians. To preserve the enclave, he is willing to do or sacrifice almost anything. Therefore, he allowed the infamous anti-Christian warrior Eirik Longtooth to become its protector, giving the Gangrel practically free reign. This has proved to be a mistake. Longtooth may be a superb warrior, but his hatred of Christianity will not let him rest. He roams further from the enclave each month, hunting down Christians who make a great show of their faith, draining them dry and offering their bloodless corpses to the Aesir in triumph. Eirik has grown more unstable over the last few decades, and he slays any Christian Cainite he finds within a few miles of the enclave. Thus far, only one such Cainite has eluded his grasp.

Ambrosio Vitalis, a Lasombra monk, recently arrived in Scandinavia on assignment from Rome to make an accounting of the Cainites in the “frozen wastelands.” (He rather suspects that he may have annoyed someone higher in station, but isn’t sure exactly who.) Quite by accident, Vitalis meandered

near the enclave, but instead of meeting Final Death under Eirik’s fangs, he found another elder Gangrel. This beautiful Cainite — Ulfsdottir, childe of the All-High himself — was preparing to leave the Free State until she met the Lasombra neonate. Now, she ensures him safe passage in and out of the Free State, and she enjoys speaking with him about Western Europe, Christianity and other worldly matters.

Ulfsdottir is well aware that she may have to slay Vitalis some night, but she rather hopes that it won’t be necessary. Her Feral sensibilities have changed somewhat as she has watched Longtooth grow more out of control, but she is adamantly opposed to forsaking Odin for Christ — at least tonight. If the Faithful Lasombra monk continues to sway her, however, the Free State may lose one of its most important protectors.

The Baltic

Across the Baltic from Sweden lie the lands of Livonia and Prussia. The last pagan bastions of Northern Europe, these lands are dark, wild and frightening. The people of the Baltic lands enjoyed their traditional pagan ways until the coming of the Christian Knights, who rode down on them and forced them to convert or die.


Suppression, change and loss are almost certainly the future of the Baltics, for both mortals and Cainites. In the year 1230, the natives of these lands are at war with foreign oppressors.

Latvia

South of Finland and the Russian ports in the Baltic, with an almost strategically placed coastline between the east and the west, lies Latvia. North of Lithuania and thereby nearly isolated from the continent, directly opposite the Swedish Gotland island, Latvia is an obvious juncture for trading. Having been inhabited for thousands of years, these are old lands to which the people bear deep ties. These people were warriors, not traders, and they worshipped old, dark pagan gods, not the “merciful” Christ.

Invasions

Over the second half of the 12th century, German traders needed to establish trade routes with the east, particularly Novgorod in Russia. They founded a trading post by the banks of Daugava and invaded the lands. The native Livonians and Latvians engaged the invaders, but their forces were too



strong, and when Pope Innocent III declared papal support against the pagans, the aggressors managed to establish their colony.

In 1201, Riga was founded on the shores of Daugava, as the Bishop Albert erected a stronghold here. In 1202, the knightly order the Brethren of the Sword, or Brethren of the Knighthood of Christ of Livonia, was founded to act as a permanent military presence in Riga. The Brethren quickly subdued the native peoples and established their conquered lands — Livonia and Couverland — under the rule of the episcopate of Riga. In 1207, a new order sprang out of the Brethren of the Sword, intent on converting Prussia as it had Latvia, and in 1211, the foundations for the Dome Cathedral in Riga were laid, strengthening the tight grip of Christendom on the lands.

Albert, the Bishop of Riga is also the leader of the Brethren of the Sword, which makes him a man with tremendous power in Latvia. With power comes corruption, however, and Bishop Albert is no exception. Rather than indulging in gluttony or lust, though, he has become addicted to the vitae of the Cainites. Seduced into depravity by the relentless Lasombra Sinner Georg von Hessen, Albert became a most valuable ally for the Magister. Von Hessen had ties in Germany, and he planned to use his position over Albert to gain control over more important trade centers in Eastern Europe. Yet, a chance meeting (possibly arranged by the Faithful crusader Lord Horst de Novara) with a band of Brethren ended von Hessen's unlife, and freed Albert from the blood oath.

Albert has discovered, however, that vitae is not solely attainable through von Hessen, and he has begun scheming to obtain it. Albert has started using his crusaders in capturing Cainites and bringing them to him in Riga. Some of these knights have begun to question why these demons must be captured "alive" and brought to the bishop, while others simply revel in the hunt. Soon, however, Albert might be called to task for his actions, either by the Cainites or his own Brethren.

Cainites of Latvia

A handful of Tzimisce make their havens in Latvia. Forced into an alliance with the native Gangrel, they struggle to protect their lands from the western devils. Because of the ease of access by sea, however, and the economic powers of the knights, they fight a losing battle. The Gangrel Lacplesis the Bear-Slayer leads his Animals against the crusaders, while chiefmost among the Fiends stands Vala. Lacplesis is renowned for his exceptional size and ferocity, and he

often fights the Christians in the shape of a bear. His band of Gangrel and wild beasts haunts the dreams of many a veteran crusader lucky enough to survive the battles. Vala is a calculating, ruthless woman with a deep craving for the power that lies embedded in the darkness of the Latvian earth. She has already killed several powerful clanmates opposing her, and she is not going to let the knights or the Gangrel stand in her way.

Among the crusaders stands Lord Horst de Novara of Clan Ventrue as a vassal of Hardestadt, seeking both to convert the Livonians to Christianity and to gain sway over the region's trade. Economic factors are perhaps the main reasons for conquest, both for Cainites and kine.

Mortals of Latvia

The Germanic Knights rule through the establishment of small town-states, usually headed by a bishop. Towns such as Riga, Cesis, Ventspils and Kuldiga have become important for the European market as the suppliers of fine Baltic amber. Plus, Latvia is perfectly situated as a trade route with Russia.

The ruling class of Latvia is exclusively German at this time, while the lower classes, mainly peasants and artisans, are Latvians. Unlike many other conquered nations, it is impossible for a Latvian to become German in a social context — that ethnic border remained. This disparity resulted in the Latvian ethnic identity being preserved, unlike the Prussian ethnicity, which eventually vanishes completely.

Lithuania

South of Latvia lies Lithuania. To the east of these lands lie the empires of Muscovy and the Tatars. To the south and west stretch the vast expanse of Christian Europe.

Lithuania as a nation is first mentioned in mortal history in 1009, as a missionary, Saint Bruno, is murdered on the border of Lithuania and Ruthenia. But people have lived in those small river valleys by the harsh Baltic Sea since long before the birth of Christ, before there was a Rome, an Athens or a Carthage.

Lithuania is one of Europe's last pagan kingdoms. Kin to the Belarussians, and speaking a language as ancient as the continent, the Lithuanians are an old people. The country was recently declared Christian, in an effort for the lord Mindaugas to become king. The conversion is a purely political move, and all know it.

A scant few years ago, the German Teutonic Knights commenced their crusades against this small kingdom. In 1226, the Polish Duke Konrad invited the Teutonic Order to Chelmno, to garner support against the pagan Prussians. The Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, Hermann von Salza, arrived later that year at the head of a contingent of German knights. It was expected that their stay would be short, that business in the Holy Land or in the West would take them away. As of 1230, though, they still have not left, and their crusades against the pagans continue both in Prussia and Lithuania. The Teutonic Knights enjoy political support from the western European kingdoms and the Papacy. They appear fated to plague the entirety of Eastern Europe as long as they work to Christianize the pagan lands in the Baltic Region. Their first victims were the Prussians, a tribe that controlled the amber trade along the Baltic coast. The Teutonic Knights massacred them wherever they were found. The Lithuanians knew they were next, and indeed, bloody skirmishes now scar the land.

Threatened from the north by the newly Christianized Livonia and from the west by the Germans, Lithuania's existence as a nation state is one of necessity and expediency. The king affects Christianity to secure his right to rule and ensure recognition from Rome, but the Lithuanians are a pagan people. It is their resistance to the White Christ that unites them.

The Cainites of Lithuania

Originally far fewer clans were present in Lithuania. Cainites from Clans Gangrel and Nosferatu could be found, and the most notable vampiric rulers of Lithuania were ancient Tzimisce and Malkavians. But with the coming of the Teutonic Knights, the Faithful have taken an interest in Lithuania and have begun extensive campaigns to rid the land of its original Cainite inhabitants, mainly sponsored by the Patrician Horst de Novara. De Novara is attempting to form a trading cartel to rival the human Hanseatic League, and he uses the crusading knights in Lithuania and Latvia as a cover for his attempts to install his own followers. He also searches for willing compatriots, so young, devoted Cainites who are prepared to work hard in the name of the Lord are quite welcome in his camps.

The bloody battles fought between the pagan people and the Teutonic Knights have their counterparts in the Cainite societies. Many a Cainite has met with Final Death on both sides.

One unique bloodline dwells in this land. It is a strange offshoot of the Tremere, known as the Telyavelic Tremere.

Originally they left the clan to seek a way to restore their humanity. In the wild and harsh landscape of Lithuania they found refuge among the pagan population, who saw them as incarnations of the god Telyavel (protector of the dead). Although they still have not regained their humanity, they have achieved a close connection with the living world. They operate openly among the pagan population, as do other Cainites in the region. They also have assumed the duties of priests and shamans and made a place for themselves in pagan societies. This means, of course, that what threatens the pagan beliefs also threatens the Telyavs. (More information on Telyavelic Tremere can be found in *Libellus Sanguinis II*.)

The Krive

Less than two decades ago, each major region of Lithuania had its own Cainite "watcher" overseeing


PAGAN RELIGIONS

"Pagan religion" is something of a misleading term. "Pagan" comes from a word that simply means "country dweller," and it typically refers to anyone who follows a native, non-Judeo-Christian religion. That similarity is really the only one that can be drawn between such faiths. Even in such a relatively small area as Lithuania, the diversity of pagan beliefs was great, and to sum them up here would be impossible.

A few generalizations can be made, however. Many Lithuanians revered a holy trinity of deities. In short these were Andai, who ruled the heavens; Perkunas, God of Thunder and Telieval (Telyaval) who was allied with Perkunas against the reign of Heaven and protected the dead. The other major strand of belief was a form of animism, wherein the ancient spirits of the earth were considered wise and knowledgeable, and called upon for advice or aid. The spirits were summoned up and worshipped on an "alka," a grove sacred enough for rituals or sacrifices to be carried out there.

Furthermore, communing with the natural world and showing respect for the turning of seasons were important parts of the pagan belief. The ultimate truth was believed to exist in the natural world, and that one could interpret the will of the gods from the behavior of animals.

More on the pagan religious practices in Lithuania, as well as supernatural presence, can be found in *Transylvania by Night*.



many of the spiritual affairs of the night, and answering to the Krivê. This being, always a Cainite and often a Malkavian, was revered by the undead of Lithuania as a spiritual leader akin to the Christian pope. The oldest legends of the Lithuanian people, in fact, speak of a “dead, pale king who at his court sups with faeries as wolves and laughs while he drinks of warm blood.” Whatever the full truth behind these legends is, the vampiric Krivê acted as a paragon to many of the region’s Cainites, up until recently.

Now the Germanic Ventrue have hunted the high priests down one by one and put them to the flame. What few survived the Ventrue massacres often fall to the Tremere, who are solidifying their power over the Lithuanian pagans. Bereft of his main source of information and support, the Krivê, currently a Malkavian called Androjai, is looking for other allies. What exactly he might find is unknown, but the pagan peoples of Lithuania are certainly looking for a way to strike back. Androjai is notorious among the undead in Eastern Europe, and strange rumors fly about his dealings with dark fae. Androjai is not without allies, whatever their nature may be.

At this time, Lithuania is still a harsh land of mystery and paganism, though the ways of old are seriously threatened by the invading Teutonic Knights and their Christian God. Lithuania still has a stronger resistance than Prussia, which is all but overrun, but the future seems dark and uncertain for the people and Cainites of Lithuania. Then again, the knights and the Ventrue have yet to completely crush their opponents, and they cannot yet rest on their laurels — not if they want to secure their victory.

Prussia

Along the southeast bend of the Baltic coast, north of Poland, lies Prussia. In early times, it was inhabited by Slavic tribes in the west and Baltic tribes, closely related to the Lithuanians, in the east. They made their homes in the region between Vistula and the lower Niemen rivers. The name Prussia is derived from the name of this people: Prussi (or Borussi). Prussia had never been part of the Holy Roman Empire. It had been a region of pagan tribes the Empire weren’t able to conquer. Not many Cainites wandered this land in these times, though some Gangrel made their homes here in the wild.

In the 10th century, the people and Cainites would be given a taste of things to come. During this era, the Saxons entered Prussia and made strong attempts to convert the pagans to Christianity. They were met

with heavy resistance. The Saxons lacked the financial and militant backing necessary, and the many tribes proved hard to convince and even harder to fight. Few Cainites traveled to Prussia, except those attempting to use the momentum of the Saxons to secure power they could never hope to gain in their home regions. But like their human counterparts, they made little headway, and the few vampires indigenous to Prussia fought them at every turn. The stories told of these vampires’ ferocity was often enough to discourage others from seeking their fortunes on the soil of Prussia.

The Saxons and the invading Cainites failed, and the Bohemian bishop Saint Adalbert was martyred as a missionary in Prussia in 997. Once again, Prussia was a pagan land, but unfortunately the Saxon invasion only marked the beginning of the attempt to Christianize the region.

The Coming of the Cross

By 1230, everything has changed. The Teutonic Knights, a religious order of warrior monks, were re-deployed from Palestine to the Baltic, where they took over the duty of Christianizing the region. (See Chapter Three for more information.) They began to carry out several yearly campaigns and pose as a good venue for aristocrats in search of glory. The threat this invasion poses to the Prussi and their way of life is far greater than any before, and already the Teutonic Knights have made great headway toward their goal of conquering the region.

The indigenous Cainites fight the newcomers, as do the Prussian people, and the war is both bloody and demanding. Despite their strong convictions and fighting prowess, the future looks dark for the pagan ways of Prussian people and Cainites. The fight is not yet over, but it becomes harder and harder. Leading the Prussian Gangrel against the westerners is Borovich the Grim, a hard and relentless Animal. Borovich’s childe, Tengael, has started to realize that they are losing, and is trying to convince his sire to flee and find new territories, but the old Gangrel will not listen.

Cainites in Prussia

An important stronghold for the Teutonic Knights is the city of Bautzen, situated on the borders of Poland and Bohemia. Prussian slaves are kept here before being shipped south to Constantinople. Clan Ventrue has major interests in Bautzen. The Hanseatic League have expressed interest in the city and offered it the chance to join the League, but the Knights have refused

THE FATE OF THE KNIGHTS IN PRUSSIA

The knights' campaign to Christianize Prussia proves successful. In 1234, they win the battle of Sirguna. Having defeated the pagan tribes, the pope assumes control over the region and leases it to the Teutonic Knights, who rule it as a fiefdom. Prussia has been converted at the point of a sword, and the ways of old begin to disappear. The Grand Master of the Order moves his residence to Marienburg castle. Some of the pagan tribes remain in existence, but they are all gone by the 16th century.

so far, seeking to keep the bounty the city brings to themselves. Several Patricians with influence within the League but not within the order are angered over this, but there is little they can do for now.

The invading Ventrue's progress is aided by the fact that Prussia is far from the Tzimisce homeland, which means the Patricians face much less concerted Cainite resistance. The Gangrel of Prussia fight savagely and alone against the aggressors, but they are a fractious lot. There is one thing that is to the defending vampires' advantage. Lord Jürgen has become involved in conflicts with fellow members of Clan Ventrue, and this infighting in the clan prevents him from devoting his complete attention to his foes to the east.

These nights in Prussia are just as troubled for the Children of Caine as the day is for mortals of the region. Invading Ventrue do their best to rid the region of the indigenous vampires and their support. Wars result, waged by Ventrue against Gangrel and the few Tzimisce that have taken residence here. Some Tremere can be found in the region since they do not need to fear the Tzimisce as they do in the homeland of the Fiends. For the Ventrue, the war is about gaining more power and land. For the original Cainites of Prussia, it is a war for survival, both for their very unives and for all they hold dear.

Notable Cainites

Lord Horst de Novara,
the Merchant Crusader

9th-generation Ventrue, childe of Rudolf Brandl,
walker on the Road of Heaven

Nature: Defender

Demeanor: Judge

Embrace: AD 1098

Apparent Age: late 20s

Lord Horst was a minor nobleman in life, but he always had a trader's sensibilities. This might have made him a shrewd leader — as he could often tell if someone was withholding information or a better offer — but he was the fourth son of a father whose lands were dwindling anyway. Faced with death in the Crusades, he dutifully rode off to fight the Infidels.

The company with which he rode, however, became horribly lost in a storm and instead arrived in Prague. Lord Horst, reasoning that either Satan was misleading God's faithful crusaders or that God didn't *want* him to go to Outremer, decided to err on the side of God and stayed in Prague. While there, he met Rudolf Brandl, and immediately understood what nobility was. Brandl was a ruler, obviously, although Horst didn't know immediately what title Brandl might claim. The young man introduced himself, and he and Brandl spoke at length about the duties of nobility and how they were likely to change over the years.

Exactly why Brandl Embraced Horst is something of a puzzle to both men. Horst was never a genius, and Brandl had little need of a pawn at the time. Yet, when it was done, Horst realized that playing



shadow games was not for him, and he left Prague at the suggestion of Joseph Zvi. (As it turned out, that was probably a wise choice — see Chapter Six.)

Horst went in search of direction and eventually was schooled on the Road of Heaven. However, Horst's faith had always been lackluster, and so it was here as well. His tutor rejected him, hoping, she said, that he would find God one way or another. And Lord Horst wandered for nearly a hundred years, sometimes in service to another vampire, sometimes on his own, until he chanced to cross paths with Hardestadt the Elder.

The mighty Patrician was sickened to see one of his own blood in such a mediocre state, and he im-

mediately bound Horst with a blood oath. Quickly discerning that the Faithful Ventrue's greatest skill lay in trade, he sent Lord Horst off to establish the Patricians in the trade routes in Prussia.

Horst does his job well enough, but his faith is faltering. With every kill he makes, he sees pagan Cainites and mortals with more faith in their old, beaten gods than he has in his savior. Slowly, that realization takes him ever closer to the Beast. Unfortunately, Hardestadt is completely unaware of his vassal's degeneration. If Horst falls, it may create the power gap the native Cainites (Vala especially) require to take back the Prussian nights.





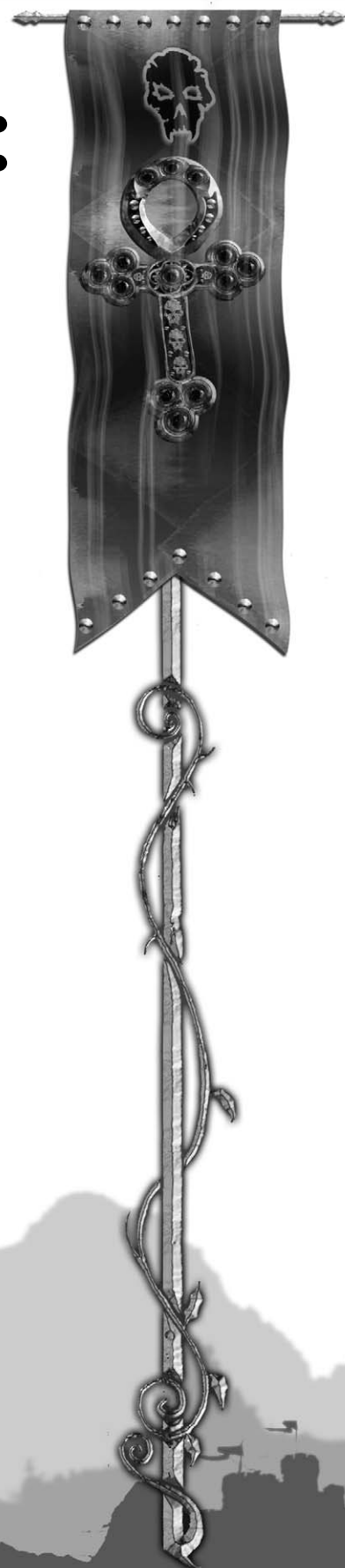


CHAPTER EIGHT: BYZANTINE SUCCESSOR STATES

“We believe that the Greeks have been punished by the just judgment of God — these Greeks who have striven to rend the Seamless Robe of Jesus Christ ... Those who would not join Noah in his ark perished justly in the deluge; and these have justly suffered famine and hunger who would not receive as their shepherd the blessed Peter, Prince of the Apostles.”

—Pope Innocent III

For centuries, Byzantium was the only surviving remnant of the ancient Roman Empire, preserving elements of its history and culture long after Rome herself had fallen. It's little wonder, then, that its inhabitants called themselves *Rhomaioi* — Romans — and looked with disdain upon the squalid nations of the West. Such arrogance was common even among the empire's Cainites, who saw Byzantium's capital, Constantinople, as a utopia, a shining example of vampiric power and prestige. They called it “Michael's Dream” (or simply “the Dream”), after the Toreador Methuselah who ruled there, and they believed that nothing could ever shatter their perfect world, least of all mortals.



MORTALS

Andronicus I — The Emperor of Trebizond has made the best of a bad situation. Even though his realm will never become an influential one, Andronicus has guaranteed its security for many years to come.

Baldwin II — Baldwin gained the Latin throne of Constantinople with the aid of his father-in-law, John of Brienne, who rules with him. Together, they are attempting to hold together the rapidly disintegrating Latin Empire.

John III — Ruler of Nicaea. John has many enemies, but he is renowned for diplomatic skill, including an alliance with the Turks against the Mongols, whose horde will arrive in Asia Minor in a few years.

Manuel — Despot of Epirus. This man has made some gains against the Latin crusaders, but there is some question as to whether he has the strength to capitalize on them and retake Constantinople.

How wrong they were. In 1204, the armies of the Fourth Crusade invaded the Queen of Cities, believing they'd be rewarded for restoring the deposed emperor Isaac II to the throne. Events quickly proved that neither Isaac nor his son had the ability to govern the empire — or pay back the crusaders for their efforts. Influenced by Venetian mercantile interests, the leaders of the crusade decided to take matters into their own hands. In a three-day orgy of destruction, they conquered Constantinople and installed one of their own, Baldwin of Flanders, as emperor of Byzantium. The Venetians took most of the empire's ports, three-eighths of the capital city and the Patriarchate of Constantinople.

Initially, Pope Innocent III was appalled by the crusaders' actions and excommunicated the Venetians whom he blamed for leading the soldiers astray. Eventually, he accepted the sack of Constantinople as providential, a way to unite East and West, Orthodox and Catholic, in the face of the growing power of the Turks. The Byzantines took a less forgiving view. Nobles, ecclesiastics and military leaders fled the western conquerors and established several successor states in outlying

CAINITES

Alfonzo (7th-generation Lasombra) — Prince of Constantinople. Alfonzo achieved his position through treachery and remains in a precarious situation. He depends on Latin Cainites for his power, which may prove problematic if the Greeks ever regain power in the city.

Anna Comnena (7th-generation Ventrue) — Prince of Nicaea. Anna hates Alfonzo and the Latins with a passion. She plots their destruction and seeks to gain Constantinople for herself.

Hektor (6th-generation Brujah) — This powerful Cainite rules the island "paradise" of New Lacadaemonia, where vampires openly rule over mortals.

Herleva (8th-generation Brujah) — This Norman Cainite is Prince of Durazzo, and she works to return the Sicilians to power in this coastal city. She is opposed by Greek Cainites, who vow to destroy Latin power in the city.

Natalya Svyatoslav (7th-generation Brujah) — Prince of Thessalonica, this Slavic Cainite also wishes to regain Constantinople, because she considers it the last hope for the new Carthage she seeks.

regions, each one intent on retaking Constantinople — and the heritage of Rome — when the opportunity presented itself. That time has not yet come, but they have little doubt that it will come one day, and they shall be ready for it.

If anything, the Cainites were even more surprised and horrified by the events of 1204 than were the kine. They had lived so long under the spell of Michael's Dream that few had ever considered the possibility of its destruction. They shared the arrogance of mortal Byzantines, who did not believe western Europeans capable of overthrowing the descendant of the glory of Rome. In the chaos of the sack, many Cainites met their Final Deaths, including Michael himself. Many others fled to the various Byzantine successor states, where they plot not merely the recapture of Constantinople but also vengeance upon the western Cainites who took advantage of the Fourth Crusade's diversion to less than holy ends. As the War of Princes escalates, the Byzantine successor states will become a locus of violence and betrayal. More than a few vampires will meet the flames in the years to come.

Latin Empire of Constantinople

The crusaders seized Byzantium in 1204 and established their own empire, which they call either the Latin Empire of Constantinople (to distinguish it from the Greek Empire that preceded it) or *Romania* (because it is heir to the legacy of ancient Rome). Unlike the Greek Empire, the Latin Empire is a feudal state, much like most western European realms, with the emperor in Constantinople as the ultimate suzerain. Beneath him are numerous vassals, such as the King of Thessalonica, the Prince of Achaia and the Duke of Athens.

The Latin Empire began its existence as a powerful successor to Byzantium, infusing the military might of the crusaders and the financial backing of the Vene-

tians into the already-existing structure provided by the Greeks. Its promising start inspired many western Europeans to believe that a turning point had been reached in the battle against the Saracens. With Constantinople safely in Latin hands, they hoped future crusades might have greater and long-lasting successes. Clerics believed that the long-sought-after unity of the Church would at last be achieved, allowing Christendom to present a single front against Islam.

Such was not to be. The crusaders and the Venetians quickly turned to squabbling amongst themselves. The Greek population of the empire held the Latins in contempt and largely rejected the Catholic Church's claims to supremacy (with a few notable exceptions). With fierce enemies — the Turks, the Bulgars and several Byzantine successor states — on all sides, the Latin Empire quickly became a shadow of its former self. In 1204, its territory included large portions of Asia Minor, the Balkans and Aegean

MICHAEL THE PATRIARCH

Throughout this chapter, the reader will find references to the Toreador Methuselah Michael, sometimes calling him "the Patriarch." Although he met Final Death in 1204, his history and influence linger. For the benefit of those who own neither **Constantinople by Night** nor **Bitter Crusade**, here is a brief summary of his unlife and importance to Byzantium:

- Michael was born Mi-ka-il around 2200 BC in the Mesopotamian city of Ebla. He became the king's scribe and was Embraced by the Toreador Antediluvian. During this time, he took many lovers, including a young woman named Ma-ri.

- When Ebla fell, he fled to the Fertile Crescent and renamed himself Beshter. He was worshipped as a god, which drew the attention of Akkadian vampires, who wished to destroy him.

- He fled yet again, this time to the West, including the city of Rome. He traveled extensively and eventually converted to Christianity, taking the name Michael. He took two Cainite lovers, the Ventrue Antonius and the Tzimisce called the Dracon.

- When Rome began to deteriorate, Michael and his lovers moved to Byzantium, where they fostered "the Dream," the belief that Constantinople could become a Cainite utopia under the gentle tutelage of the Patriarch (as Michael now styled himself).

- Over time, Michael slowly grew mad, believing that he was on the verge of Divinity. He fell into torpor and awakened only occasionally — as the Cainites of Constantinople squabbled in his absence.

- By the time of the Fourth Crusade, Michael was hopelessly insane. Believing in his own imminent apotheosis, he submitted to diablerie at the hands of his former lover, Ma-ri (now known as "Mary the Black"), who blamed Michael for the misfortunes she had experienced since the fall of Ebla. Thus, the Methuselah died when Byzantium needed him most, but his Dream still holds power for Byzantine Cainites even now.

- Since his destruction, a cult has grown up around Michael, particularly among Byzantine Cainites who remained in Constantinople. A syncretistic blend of paganism and Orthodox Christianity, the cult believes that Michael lived on earth as "the Father" and gave his life as "the Son." Now, as "the Spirit," he grants wisdom and enlightenment to his followers, who claim the gifts of prophecy and miracles. These "Michaelites" await the imminent arrival of Gehenna, when Michael the Spirit will save them before the world is consumed in fire forever. Unsurprisingly, the Michaelites are persecuted by Latin vampires, who consider their cult as blasphemous as the Cainite Heresy and even more politically dangerous.

Islands. By 1230, it has contracted to a small patch of land on both sides of the Bosphorus strait, including the Queen of Cities, Constantinople. Other cities in Greece and the Balkans remain in Latin hands (as do many Aegean islands), but they are largely cut off from the remaining territory of the empire. They must fend for themselves by making alliances with the Greeks and Bulgars to retain their independence.

Politics within the Latin Empire are extraordinarily chaotic and unpredictable. Its Latin rulers vacillate between a desire to loot its holdings for their own personal wealth and to consolidate their power at the expense of their rivals. The Venetians' behavior is a prime example of these tendencies, as they carry back huge amounts of Byzantine gold and other treasures to Italy while pressing their claims to mercantile supremacy over their erstwhile allies in the region at the same time.

The Cainite situation is no better. After the death of Michael the Patriarch, the Lasombra Bishop Alfonzo of Venice declared himself Prince of Constantinople with the support of other Latin vampires. A devotee of the Cainite Heresy, Alfonzo ruled harshly from the outset, punishing any who opposed him in matters of politics or religion. This practice earned him many enemies, both among the remaining Byzantine Cainites and non-Heretical Latin vampires. This in

turn forced him to adopt a more conciliatory tone. Alfonzo showed the sincerity of his new attitude by first repudiating Narses, now-deceased Archbishop of Nod, and leader of the Cainite Heresy (although he still remains dedicated to the cult's beliefs) and then elevating lesser Greek vampires into positions of authority within his new regime.

Although Alfonzo's plan has quieted his critics within Constantinople, it hasn't ended opposition to his rule. Both Anna Comnena in Nicaea and Natalya Svyatoslav in Epirus work to undermine his power, sending agents into the Latin Empire to sow discord and instability. Even many Latin Cainites would prefer to see Alfonzo overthrown. Chief among them is Gabriella of Genoa, a non-Heretical Lasombra whom some clan elders favor as a replacement for the tyrannical Prince of Constantinople. Some elements within the Cainite Heresy's Crimson Curia likewise bear ill will toward Alfonzo. They see in him the making of another Narses, a vampire who cares more for the power the Heresy gives him than in its spiritual beliefs. So far, the Curia has made no moves against Alfonzo, preferring to see if his reign can be "salvaged." However much they do not wish him to weaken the Heresy by his machinations, they also recognize the value in having one of their own as prince in an important city. For now, they wait patiently for new developments.

Visitors to the Latin Empire — whether mortal or undead — are thus struck by a palpable juxtaposition between the realm's immense wealth and ancient history and its inevitable destruction. An unmistakable air of doom hangs about the place. Few doubt that the end of Byzantium is near, perhaps not immediately, but within the next century or so. The Empire's fate is sealed, and there's little that either Cainite or kine can do to change that. The question now becomes how best to react to its inexorable demise: fight valiantly despite it or flee to preserve some small portion of its irreplaceable heritage.

Adrianople

The city of Adrianople once before spelled the beginning of the end for Roman rule — and it could do so again. In AD 378, the Emperor Valens died, along with 40,000 of his troops, at the hands of a Gothic army. Although the Goths did not take Adrianople itself (its walls were too thick), the barbarians now knew that they could defeat the Romans on their own territory. It wasn't long before the West fell completely under barbarian rule and the East adopted a defensive position that would take centuries to reverse.

QUIDNOMINE?

Throughout this chapter, many names for groups and peoples are bandied about, some of which might prove confusing for players and Storytellers who are unfamiliar with the region in the 13th century. Here's a quick summary:

- **Byzantine:** Refers to the Eastern Roman Empire, with its capital at Constantinople, which was conquered by the Fourth Crusade in 1204.
- **Byzantium:** The original name of Constantinople. Used colloquially to refer to the entire Eastern Roman Empire.
- **Franks:** The Byzantine term for the French. Also, a synonym for "crusader."
- **Greek:** Refers to the Greek-speaking (and generally Orthodox) peoples who inhabited the Eastern Roman Empire.
- **Latin:** Refers to the inhabitants of Western Europe, whether or not they spoke a Latin-derived language. Latins are almost exclusively Roman Catholic in religion.

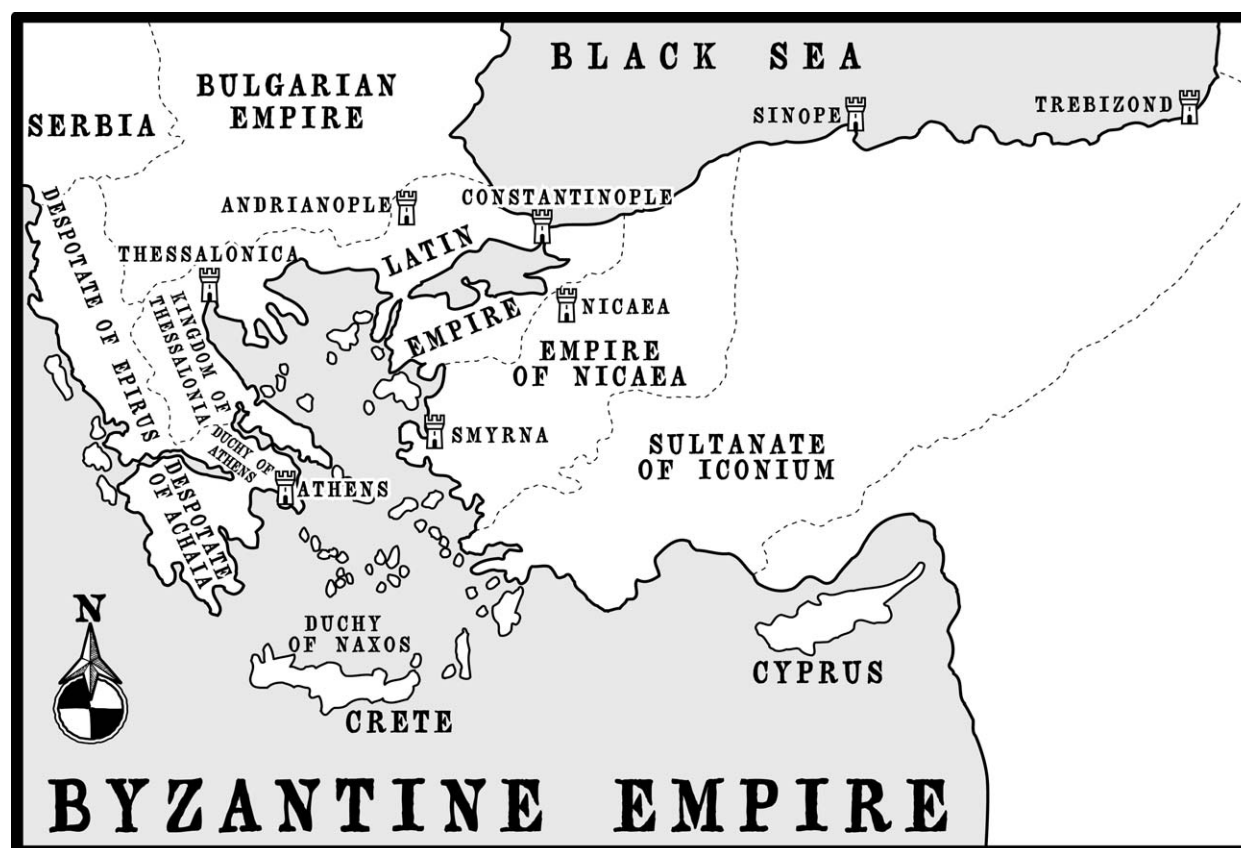
Now, Adrianople stands at the westernmost border of the Latin Empire, and the Bulgars stand at its gates. Just a year after the crusaders took Constantinople, a combined Greek and Bulgarian army dealt the Latins a devastating blow at Adrianople. Like the Goths of centuries past, they did not capture the city, which remained under Venetian control, but they showed that Byzantine power did not die with the capture of its capital. Adrianople is an armed camp, with crusaders and mercenaries a common sight on its narrow streets. Daily, soldiers throng the city, and all realize that the fall of Adrianople probably signals the end of the Latin Empire as well.

A Roman Lasombra named Marcus Licinius is Prince of Adrianople. During Michael's rule in Constantinople, he maintained good relations with Byzantine Cainites. Since the Patriarch's death, Licinius has avoided allying himself with any faction, waiting to see how mortal events play out before making his move. Licinius has sympathy for the Latins, but his true allegiance lies with any force that can keep Islam at bay. He fears the Muslims will destroy commerce on the Mediterranean, and thus his connection to the wider Cainite world.

Constantinople

Constantinople, the Queen of Cities, remains the jewel of Christendom, albeit one tarnished by war and betrayal. Founded on the site of the earlier Greek trading city of Byzantium, Constantinople received its modern name — and status as capital of the Eastern Roman Empire — in AD 324. Constantine the Great wanted a capital that was both militarily defensible and removed from the decay of the Italian peninsula. Christians would also argue that he sought to create a “Christian Rome” that built upon the foundation of pagan Rome and surpassed it through acceptance of Christ.

True or not, Constantinople prospered, surviving largely unmolested while Old Rome fell before the Ostrogoths and other barbarians. The city weathered internal unrest, such as the Nika Revolts and the Iconoclastic Controversy, only to become the greatest city known to Europe and the Middle East. Its grand structures, such as the Hippodrome and the Hagia Sophia, knew no rivals anywhere — certainly not in the benighted cities of Western Europe. Wealthy beyond imagining and the epicenter of a powerful empire, Constantinople elicited equal parts awe and envy from those who entered its gates.





It's little wonder, then, that the Venetians and crusaders decided to take the city for themselves when its haughty rulers treated the Latins no better than the barbarians they'd repelled for centuries. For all its wealth and power, Constantinople was rife with factions and parties, each one weakening its ability to defend against the crusaders. This was equally true of its ancient Cainite inhabitants, who vied with one another for the favor of Michael the Patriarch. When he too was destroyed, Constantinople's vampires had no idea what to do, which made them easy prey for the driven Latin Cainites who accompanied the crusaders into the city. Within months, Western vampires had firmly established themselves as Byzantium's new masters. Its older inhabitants could either acquiesce to the inevitable or flee. Resistance almost assuredly meant Final Death.

After more than a quarter-century, Constantinople's old ways have returned, this time among the Latin Cainites. As noted earlier, Prince Alfonzo finds himself surrounded by enemies, which limits his ability to act with the impunity he wishes. More significantly, the city's remaining Byzantine vampires have begun to reassert themselves. Cainites of the Ventrue and Toreador clans openly defy Alfonzo and work against his rule.

More significantly, Nosferatu and Gangrel have begun to reappear in greater numbers. Under Michael's

rule, members of both clans played an integral role in the city's life. For a time, they fled Constantinople, looking for safer havens. The leader of the Constantinople's Gangrel, Baron Thomas Feroux, is a Latin himself, but he holds little in common with his brethren, having adopted Byzantium as his true home. He works with the Nosferatu to restore hope among the dispirited Byzantine Cainites, preparing the way for the eventual return of Greek rule. Unfortunately, Feroux realizes that this endeavor may be made more difficult by the divided allegiances of Byzantine vampires. Some — himself included — favor Natalya Svyatoslav of Epirus, while others prefer Anna Comnena. For the moment, Feroux downplays this split, appealing instead to Byzantine solidarity in the face of Latin oppression. Ultimately, though, the matter must be resolved, or else Cainites may face an even more difficult time ousting their western rivals than will their mortal counterparts.

Duchy of Athens

The Duchy of Athens is one of several fiefdoms within the Latin Empire. Originally, the Duke of Athens — or “megaskyr” in Greek — owed fealty to the King of Thessalonica. In 1224, however, the Despotate of Epirus conquered Thessalonica, leaving the duchy without an immediate liege lord. Now cut

off from the rest of the empire, Athens nevertheless survives by making alliances with other Latin enclaves, Greek rivals of Epirus and the Bulgars. In fact, the duchy has done reasonably well for itself.

Its rulers, a family from Franche-Comté, maintain steady contacts with Western Europe, despite their geographical separation. Latin traders, soldiers and clerics regularly travel the duchy, assisting the ruling family in holding the city. Through their efforts, they've transformed the region into a strange amalgam of Eastern and Western traditions, a realm where the language of politics and commerce is French but where Greek continues to be the speech of the common folk. Similarly, a Roman Catholic hierarchy rules over a populace still devoted to Greek Orthodoxy. Somehow, though, the conflicting traditions exist side by side, and the duchy seems unlikely to fall before Epirus or any other Byzantine forces anytime soon.

Athens

The ancient city of Athens retains many vestiges of its former glory, with numerous monuments and ruins from bygone days. Unlike Constantinople, which possesses a clear sense of having fallen from grace, Athens is more like a museum, a preserved remnant of an age long gone. In a way, that makes it far more inviting than Constantinople, which may explain the strange vibrancy the city shows under foreign rule.

Of course, Athens is not without its troubles. In particular, the conflict between the Catholic priests and the Orthodox populace grows more heated every month. The duke wants to Latinize his realm, but he is pragmatic enough to realize that forcing the issue is to court disaster. That's why he's adopted a more tolerant tone toward his Orthodox subjects than his clerical advisors (particularly the newly installed Archbishop of Athens) would prefer. Despite his forbearance, the former Orthodox hierarchy of Athens plots against the duchy from Epirus and encourages revolts against Latin rule.

The city's native Cainite population is decidedly older than many, although the arrival of the Latins has brought with it an influx of younger vampires. The prince, Dionysius, is an ancient Cappadocian of a philosophical bent. He has a profound interest in both Christianity and Islam, seeing much wisdom in these opposing faiths. Some Cainites claim that Dionysius disputed with Saint Paul during the saint's visit to Athens in the first century AD, while others suggest that he is the author of the influential Neoplatonic text on angelology entitled *The Celestial Hierarchy*. The prince remains silent on the matter, which has

only contributed to the interest that neonates take in this elder Cainite.

Principality of Achaia

The Principality of Achaia is another Latin fiefdom, which owes fealty to the Emperor in Constantinople through a chain of vassals, including the now-defeated King of Thessalonica. Like the Duchy of Athens, it's been cut off from the main body of the Latin Empire by the victories of Epirus. Nevertheless, it survives through a combination of astute diplomacy and puissant skill at arms. Achaia's rulers, the Aleman family, have shown themselves to be remarkable leaders. They have overcome both the soldiers of the Despotate of Epirus and the ill will of the local population.

Corinth

The city of Corinth has been important for centuries, making its way into the canon of the New Testament in two famous letters addressed by Saint Paul to the Christians living there. Corinth was also renowned for once having been the site of a huge temple to Aphrodite, reputedly served by hundreds of "sacred prostitutes" dedicated to the lustful rites of the goddess. Of late, the city's rich treasures and monuments have been of greater interest, attracting a raid by the Normans more than a decade before the Fourth Crusade brought Latins to Corinth permanently.

Corinth's ruler holds the title of baron from the mortal Prince of Achaia and expertly puts down dissent against Latin rule. His ironfisted ways have encouraged resistance to the crusaders, however, which would probably not please the lord of Achaia, were he told such unpleasant truths. The baron hides the truth as best he can, not wishing to seem ineffectual in the eyes of the Prince. Meanwhile, Corinth is a center of ecclesiastical scholarship, where Latin priests have begun collecting works of Aristotle and the Neoplatonists to send back to the growing universities of the west.

A Brujah named Periander, who remains aloof from mortal affairs, rules the Cainites of Corinth. He has not forbidden the city's vampires from meddling with the kine, but he frowns upon the practice, believing it beneath the Children of Caine. Instead, Periander would prefer that Cainites leave behind the trappings of the world they knew before their Embrace by concentrating on "higher things," such as the vampiric utopia many Brujah elders seek. To that end, Periander has taken great interest in New

Lacadaemonia (see page XX), and he hopes that it can serve as an example to be emulated in Corinth.

Empire of Nicaea

The Empire of Nicaea is the most powerful of the Byzantine successor states, both militarily and in geographic extent. Founded in 1205 by Theodore Laskaris, who was a son-in-law of the Byzantine emperor Alexius III, Nicaea has proven its mettle in battles against Turks and Latins alike. A combination of wily diplomacy (resulting in an alliance with the Bulgars) and unmatched strategy resulted in Nicaean victories as early as 1205, when Theodore crushed a Latin army at Adrianople. In 1214, the Nicaeans forced a treaty on Constantinople that fixed the borders between the two states. Theodore capitalizes on this treaty to continue to expand his empire. By his death in 1222, the Empire of Nicaea had almost completely expelled the Latins from Asia Minor, and it is well on its way to positioning itself to reclaim the Queen of Cities.

Theodore's son-in-law, John Vatatzes, succeeds Theodore and continues to expand the territory of the empire. By 1230, John has begun to retake the Aegean Islands from the Venetians, who claimed them as spoils of the Fourth Crusade. He has also entered into an alliance with the Despotate of Epirus against the Latins in the Duchy of Athens and Principality of Achaia. This alliance enables John to devote more attention to other enemies, such as the Bulgars (whose interests have now diverged from Nicaea) and the nomadic Cumans. Victories against the Bulgars give the Empire additional territory in the Balkans, further hemming in the weakened Latin Empire, whose death knell appears imminent.

Nicaea

The ancient city of Nicaea, the capital of the empire, is one of the richest and most cosmopolitan in all of Asia Minor. Throughout its storied history, it has been the site of two important Church councils. The first in 325 promulgated the creed that bears the city's name, while the second, in 787, resolved the Iconoclastic Controversy that was tearing the Byzantine Empire apart. In 1086, the Seljuk Turks conquered Nicaea, but the city was liberated a decade later by the First Crusade. The Byzantines in turn reclaimed the city before the crusaders had the opportunity to sack it, thereby planting seeds of resentment against the Greeks.

Nicaea lies on a fertile basin at the eastern end of the Ascanian Lake. Surrounded by walls that are about three miles long and 30 feet high with over 100 towers, the city is well defended. Outside the wall, a double ditch grants further protection. Three gates (in the north, east and south) provide access through the wall. The city's west wall rises straight out of the water and holds several smaller gates that give access to wharves and jetties that jut out onto the lake. The city is bounded to the north and south by wooded hills and mountains, including a range that towers above Nicaea at an altitude of over 2,500 feet. To the east, a wide and gently sloping valley leads away toward the Anatolian Plateau.

Nicaea was always an important center of government and culture, even before the fall of Constantinople. Since then, Theodore and his successor have gone to great lengths to establish the city as "Constantinople in miniature," a capital worthy of what they consider the only true successor to the glories of Byzantium. Consequently, Nicaea throngs with military, civil and religious officials, as well as ambassadors from lands near and far — and Cainites. Vampires from many parts of Asia Minor and beyond can be found in the court of the Ventrue Prince Anna Comnena. Visitors can find merchants and emissaries from Genoa (rivals of the Venetians), the Turks, the Mongols (see **Wind from the East** for more information), other Byzantine states and even Latins opposed to the rulers of *Romania*.

Smyrna

The seaport of Smyrna has been an important part of Roman civilization since before the advent of Christianity. Once the Gospel had been preached, Smyrna become an important center of the new faith as well, earning itself a place in the Book of Revelation as one of the fabled "seven churches" to whom Saint John refers. Despite being conquered by Saracens in the seventh century, Smyrna remained a significant Christian city, which is why first the Byzantines and, later, the crusaders fought to liberate it from Muslim rule.

Because of its importance as a seaport, Emperor Theodore Laskaris made the conquest of Smyrna an early goal of the Empire of Nicaea. He then used the port to extend Nicaean rule across the eastern Mediterranean and into the Aegean. Consequently, Nicaea's Christian and Muslim rivals both consider Smyrna an important target for their attacks. Nicaean troops and sailors protect the port, making it one of the best defended cities in the empire.

The Cainites of Smyrna are a surprisingly patriotic group, in that most support Nicaea's efforts. The prince, Nicomedes, is an unusually martial Cappadocian, who worries that Nicaea is incapable of adequately defending the port. That's why he allows Cainites in his city to act freely against Saracens and Latins alike, even if doing so runs the risk of attracting mortal attention. Nicomedes feels that it would be far worse for Smyrna to fall into enemy hands than it would for a Cainite or two to meet Final Death. Like the Prince of Adrianople, he fears the disruption in outside contact that would occur if the Saracens gained Mediterranean mastery. Yet he likewise fears the Latins, whom he considers contemptible barbarians with even less to admire than the Muslims.

New Lacadaemonia

Unlike the other settlements described here, New Lacadaemonia is quite unusual. It is a Cainite "state" — one of the few in existence anywhere. Situated on a large island in the Aegean Sea, it's home to about 20,000 mortals and 40 vampires, led by the Brujah Hektor, who styles himself "dictator" of New Lacadaemonia. The island's mortal rulers pay taxes to the Empire of Nicaea and have little to no understanding of the large number of Cainites who exist in their midst and dominate many of their leaders.

That's exactly how Hektor and the other Cainites want it. They remain largely aloof from the "helots" (as they call the mortals) and tend to the building of what they consider a vampiric utopia modeled on lost Carthage. Cainites of all of the High Clans (and most of the Low Clans) are present on New Lacadaemonia, forming an Assembly that governs the undead and upholds the Six Traditions of Caine. Neither Hektor nor the Assembly have much power outside what the Cainite citizenry allows them, however, which could prove a recipe for disaster if the Nicaeans or other mortals take a greater interest in this isolated island.

What's potentially more distressing is Hektor's obsession with introducing ancient Carthaginian religious rites, such as human sacrifice in honor of Baal-Haman, to New Lacadaemonia. He's secretly recruited a Baali named Maureen to serve as priestess of the blasphemous cult. She hides her true clan affiliation and quietly goes about recruiting other vampires into her religion. It's only a matter of time before Maureen's secret escapes (probably shattering New Lacadaemonia's peace in the process) or the Baali initiates a coup that destroys Hektor's utopian vision.

Additional information about New Lacadaemonia can be found in **The Ashen Thief**.

Despotate of Epirus and Thessalonica

Founded in 1204 by Michael Angelus, a relative of the emperors Isaac and Alexius, the Despotate of Epirus stretches from Durazzo in the north to the Gulf of Patras in the south. Originally a rival of the Empire of Nicaea, the growing power of that Byzantine successor state has brought the despotate more and more into the Nicaean orbit. Some within the despotate fear that it's only a matter of time before Epirus becomes yet another territory of their former rivals. To date, though, the Nicaeans have behaved honorably toward the despotate, assisting it against the Latins in Athens and Achaia. In 1222, this cooperation resulted in the conquest of Thessalonica, thereby allowing Theodore to claim the title "Despot of Epirus and Thessalonica" for himself.

Arta

Arta is the capital of the despotate, but it is generally an unremarkable city. The despot chose this locale because it offered a defensible position against both the Latins and the Bulgars. Of course, the despot spends very little time in Arta, being far more interested in Thessalonica, which was captured only six years ago. This gives Arta a strange character. Its primary inhabitants are soldiers and monks, the latter belonging to one of several monasteries that dot the surrounding countryside. The monks resent the presence of the soldiers, but they raise little complaint against them, lest they find themselves on the receiving end of their wrath.

Interestingly, Arta has a Cainite population of one. A lone Tzimisce, named Kyprios, has taken up residence among the monks. He is a member of the Obertus sect of Tzimisce that once had influence in Constantinople. When the leader of the Obertus, Gesu, was diablerized during the sack, Kyprios fled into Greece, fearing that there was no future for him in Byzantium. Although the Obertus survive in the Carpathians, Kyprios does not yet realize it. He believes that his comrades are all destroyed, and he leads a lonely existence of self-denial and penance. Were he to discover the truth, he would willingly make the long journey to reunite with the surviving Obertus, regardless of the risk to himself (thus leaving Arta without a Cainite prince).

Durazzo

The Adriatic port of Durazzo was conquered by the Normans (from Naples) over a century before the Fourth Crusade. The Byzantine emperor appealed to the Venetian navy for assistance in retaking the city, in exchange for exclusive trading rights to Durazzo. After expending the effort to aid the Byzantines, the Normans abandoned the city due to problems in Sicily (their stronghold in Italy), which allowed the Greeks to recapture Durazzo without Venetian aid. Unsurprisingly, this turn of events angered the Venetians. When the chance came to settle the score during the Fourth Crusade, they did so. The Venetians took and held the port until 1205, when Epirus recaptured it and incorporated it into its own territory.

Now, Durazzo is an important center of sea trade for the despotate. The Venetians — and Sicilians — still eye it covetously, and there's a good chance one or both of these seagoing powers will attempt to seize it from Epirus in the near future. A Norman Brujah named Herleva is Prince of Durazzo, and she shows a clear preference for the return of the Sicilians to the city. Cainites who openly oppose her position suffer mightily, which has created a small rebellion against her rule, spearheaded by a Greek Lasombra named Asander. The fighting between vampiric factions has become so fierce of late that it's attracted the attention of mortal hunters some of whom understand the significance of the Curse of Caine.

Nikopolis

The town of Nikopolis ("City of Victory" in Greek) was built by Augustus Caesar in commemoration of his naval victory over Antony and Cleopatra in 31 BC at Actium. A great temple to Neptune was constructed, along with many other monuments dedicated to the glory of Augustus and the gods who presumably supported his accession to supreme power in Rome. Later, the city became famous for a visit by the Apostle Paul and as a refuge of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus. During the crusaders' march on Byzantium, they burned Nikopolis (although many died in the process). The town is largely uninhabited by mortals at present, but the Despot of Epirus is considering establishing a military base here in order to step up his attacks against the Latin enclaves in the region.

Among the ruins, a Nosferatu named Mikon has established a small brood. These Cainites prey on travelers who make their way into the area (mostly Epirus soldiers these nights) but otherwise keep to themselves. Mikon is sympathetic to Natalya Svyatoslav's quest to rebuild the Library of the



Forgotten, and he occasionally provides the Prince of Thessalonica with tomes culled from the ruins of Nikopolis. In return, Mikon hopes to secure a place for himself in a restored Constantinople, a city that once gave the Lepers an important role in the city's governance.

Thessalonica

Thessalonica is a major city of the despotate, much as it was for the Byzantine Empire. Gateway to the Peloponnesus, the city has survived numerous sieges over the centuries. Numerous barbarian tribes attacked the city, as have the Saracens and the Normans. The Norman King of Sicily punished Thessalonica's citizens cruelly for the death of Latins in Constantinople in 1183. This act created a strong dislike for westerners that had not subsided by the time the Fourth Crusade took the city.

Boniface of Montferrat, an unsuccessful candidate for the throne of Constantinople, claimed Thessalonica as his seat of power and proclaimed himself its king in 1204. An alliance of Bulgars and Greeks attacked Thessalonica in 1207, and the city successfully defended itself against them. Indeed, the Tsar of the Bulgar, Kaloyan, was killed during the attempt to take the city. The disarray that followed kept Thessalonica safe until 1224, when Epirus finally overcame the Latins and claimed the city for itself. So pleased with this conquest was Theodore Laskaris that he added the phrase "and Thessalonica" to his title of "Despot of Epirus." This obsession proved his undoing, since the new Bulgarian Tsar, Assen II, killed Theodore near the city. Theodore's brother, Manuel, then became Despot and held on to Thessalonica, despite the best efforts of the Bulgars to claim it. Like many border settlements in Greece, Thessalonica remains an armed camp against its many nearby enemies.

The city currently has no Cainite prince. Its previous ruler was a Ventruie who had claimed domain by force of arms during the Fourth Crusade. He quickly proved unpopular, even with other Latin Cainites. When the local Greek Cainites turned against him, the Latins did not come to his aid, hoping it would weaken both the prince's party and the Greeks. Instead, the Greek vampires emerged stronger than expected, but still lacking the power to impose their rule on Thessalonica's undead. A civil war rages in the night, with Latin Cainites (mostly Lasombra and Brujah) fighting against their Greek counterparts for control. Into this chaotic mix come Bulgarian Cainites who seek to use the situation to their own advantage.

THE LIBRARY OF THE FORGOTTEN

The library is one of the enduring testaments of Constantinople's greatness. During the seventh and eighth centuries, Michael's lover, the Dracon, and his ghouls began collecting knowledge and assembled one of the finest libraries in the world. In the years before the destruction of the Library of Alexandria, for example, the Dracon sent his servants to transcribe some of the most precious scrolls, saving a number of tomes and books thought to be lost forever.

A collection of Cainites, led by Natalya Svyatoslav, transported portions of the Library out of Constantinople to keep it from falling into the hands of the crusaders and the Western Cainites who traveled with them. Rather than being held in one place, the library's contents (or those Natalya and her allies could save) have been secreted in numerous locations throughout the East.

Consequently, Storytellers can place caches of the Library pretty much anywhere they like, if it suits the needs of their chronicle. Quests to protect — or raid — its contents make for excellent **Dark Ages: Vampire** stories, especially since it could contain all sorts of hidden knowledge, from missing chapters of the Book of Nod to more mundane but nevertheless valuable texts like Aristotle's lost dialogues. The Library is a powerful plot device; Storytellers should use it as they wish.

Empire of Trebizond

The Empire of Trebizond is unique among the Byzantine successor states in that its founding is the result of an internal squabble that simply took advantage of the fall of Constantinople rather than of an attempt to reestablish its glories elsewhere. Two grandsons of the former Emperor Andronicus I Comnenus founded this breakaway state. One of the pair, Alexius, assumed the title "Emperor and Grand Comnenus," an indication of just how much Trebizond's existence owes to Byzantine dynastic disputes. Families displaced from their homes and from power (palace coups were normal occurrences in Constantinople) frequently established "shadow governments" in distant provinces. Trebizond is but the latest in a long tradition.

The empire comprises the entire southern coast of the Black Sea except for the westernmost region, which belongs to the Empire of Nicaea. It possesses only one city of note, Trebizond, the capital. The

western portion of the empire was granted to David Comnenus, brother of the first emperor. Nicaea quickly conquered that portion, which not only shrank the borders of Trebizond, but also deprived David of his position within the empire. In 1214, the city of Sinope fell to the Seljuk Turks, further weakening Trebizond. The emperor was then forced to become a vassal to the Sultan of Iconium. Since then, it has played little part in the ongoing political struggles of Asia Minor, but it remains an important stopover point for caravan routes heading along the Silk Road.

The Cainite population of the empire is small but diverse. Greek, Latin and Saracen vampires can be found in most cities, as well as the occasional Mongol or Cathayan emissary. These undead are surprisingly well connected to mortal society, which is not to say that they have a particularly strong hold over events among the kine. Rather, it means that most Cainites in the region don't see themselves as divorced from mortal events; they are an *extension* of them. Therefore, their conflicts and relationships derive largely from the allegiances they had before the Embrace: Genoese vs. Venetian, Greek vs. Latin, Saracen vs. Christian and so on.

Elders from many clans (particularly the Lasombra and Brujah) would find this tendency among their childer to be laughable if it weren't so potentially dangerous. By carrying mortal conflicts into the night, younger Cainites threaten to disturb the balance that exists within the empire's vampiric communities. This is particularly true in places such as Trebizond itself, where the clash between factions grows with each month. Worse still, this clash could well make the region easy pickings for the mysterious undead who travel among the Mongols and whose presence grows more frequent with each passing night. Therefore, the future of Trebizond's Cainite population — like that of its mortals — is hard to predict.

Sinope

Although it is no longer part of the Empire of Trebizond, Sinope retains many contacts with it, since it's a major Black Sea port. Traders from as far away as Scandinavia enter the region through the city. In earlier times, Viking warriors traveled down the Dneiper River to reach fabled Byzantium, where they hoped they could become members of the emperor's famed Varangian Guard. Some still make the journey even today, since there's more of a need than ever for skilled mercenaries. Among these travelers are occasional *einherjar* vampires, who ply their own unique skills in this turbulent region of the world. Indeed, rumors are circulating of an ancient *einherjar* who has entered the service of either Byzantine Cainites fighting against the Turks or of the Seljuks themselves, but

most western vampires dismiss them as mere tales. For more information on the *einherjar*, see Chapter Seven of this book and **Wolves of the Sea**.

As in Trebizond, Genoa and Venice maintain a fierce rivalry for the ear of the city's governor. The Seljuk Turkish overlords of Sinope favor the Genoese, whom they consider less a threat to their own position, if only because Genoa has fewer overt ties to either the Latin Empire of Constantinople or the Empire of Nicaea. The Cainite Prince of Sinope is a Malkavian named Razmik, who is renowned as a seer. In the past, he's fallen into a torpor-like trance for weeks or months, awakening with some prophecy of the future. During his slumber, his childer and majordomo, Shavarsh, rules in his stead. The accuracy of Razmik's prophecies is unsettling. He last predicted the fall of Sinope to the Seljuks in 1214, which allowed the city's Cainites to prepare themselves for the mortal onslaught. Razmik has recently fallen into a trance yet again, and some at his court fear that he will awaken with word of an even more terrible cataclysm to come — perhaps the onset of Gehenna itself.

Trebizond

The capital and only significant city still within the borders of the empire, Trebizond is nevertheless well known throughout Asia Minor and parts farther west. The city is at one end of the Silk Road, making it a popular destination for merchants and travelers from across Europe and the Middle East. Unlike Nicaea, which is known as a center of intrigue and diplomacy, Trebizond is better known for its exotic marketplaces and bazaars, where goods from faraway lands are sold to those who can afford them. Particularly important commodities are rugs from Persia and spices from India and Cathay. Consequently, both the Venetians and their rivals, the Genoese, have set up trading houses in Trebizond, and they compete for the favor of the imperial court of Emperor Andronicus. At present, the Genoese hold the emperor's favor, which has only encouraged the Venetians to attempt even more bold maneuvers in their efforts to gain the upper hand.

Trebizond's Cainite politics are markedly more vicious than are their mortal equivalents. A Genoese Lasombra named Selvaggia recently arrived in Trebizond, bringing with her an entourage of her three childer and several ghouls. Trebizond's prince, the Ventrue Anakletos, resents her presence and has threatened to pronounce her in violation of the Traditions of Caine if she does not submit to his rule. Support for Genoa is strong even among the lieutenants of Anakletos, however, and they have subtly blocked his efforts to bring Selvaggia to heel. As a result, some vampires presume that a palace coup is imminent — with the haughty Genoese Lasombra eyeing the principdom of

Trebizond. If so, she may find competition, since many younger Cainites consider Anakletos an inept prince unworthy of their allegiance.

Notable Cainites

Anna Comnena, Prince in Waiting

7th-generation Ventrue, childe of Ducas, walker on the Road of Humanity

Nature: Autocrat

Demeanor: Loner

Embrace: AD 1153

Apparent Age: mid 20s

Eldest child of Emperor Alexius I, Anna was reared from an early age to become Empress of Constantinople. A brilliant thinker, she absorbed political, theological, scientific and philosophical teachings while she was a young woman. The machinations of her brother John ended her dreams of imperial rule, and she was exiled to a convent, where she spent the rest of her days. It was there that her sire Embraced her and brought her into elaborate politics of Michael's vampiric court. When Constantinople fell, she initially resisted the temptation to flee the city, but her study of history had taught her the wisdom of a tactical retreat. Anna moved to Nicaea, where she has established a Cainite court in exile, mimicking the actions of Theodore I Laskaris. She schemes to return to Constantinople, so that she can destroy the Latin usurper Alfonzo and ensconce herself as Byzantium's new prince. Anna realizes that it may take decades to do so, and she is prepared to wait, for only mortals assume that great endeavors can be undertaken in a short span of time.



Natalya Svyatoslav, Prince of Thessalonica

7th-generation Brujah, childe of Tribonius, walker on the Road of Humanity

Nature: Innovator

Demeanor: Judge

Embrace: AD 1002

Apparent Age: mid 20s



The daughter of a Russian prince, Natalya was educated in Constantinople, and she fell in love with the city forever. Her skills as an administrator brought her to the attention of the Brujah, who offered her the Embrace, which she gladly accepted. Natalya then immersed herself in efforts to build a new Carthage, an embodiment both of her clan's ideals and Michael's Dream. She worked with many clans to promote cooperation and acceptance and on projects of joint interest, such as the Library of the Forgotten. After the crusaders conquered Constantinople, she fled to the Despotate of Epirus, where she eventually became Prince of Thessalonica. Natalya views Thessalonica as a useful fallback position, but she dreams of reclaiming Constantinople from Alfonzo and the Latin savages who seized it. Unlike Anna Comnena, she has no overriding interest in power or prestige, and she would gladly renounce her position if it would advance Cainite unity in the face of mortal conquests. A proud exemplar of her clan and road, Natalya still believes there's a chance that Constantinople can be restored to its former glory, despite the damage wrought in the past quarter-century.





CHAPTER NINE: OUTREMER

“Forthwith a power of English shall we levy
To chase these pagans in those holy fields
Over whose acres walk’d those blessed feet
Which fourteen hundred years ago were nail’d
For our advantage on the bitter cross.”

—William Shakespeare, *Henry IV*

In the time since the First Crusade in 1099, wherein the crusaders “liberated” Jerusalem from the Saracens, the surface of Palestine has grown spotty with various encampments, fortresses, even full-scale towns — all evidence of the determination of the Christian cause. After the crusade’s initial successes here, Frankish nobles established landed domains within areas won from the Muslims. Over the next century, the largest of these areas — places such as Acre and Jerusalem — even grew to become fully functioning feudal bureaucracies of their own. These areas in particular became Christianity’s fortresses on the front lines of the struggle to regain the Holy Land, known as “Outremer” to the Frankish settlers. As such, they have been a draw to the undead Children of Caine since their establishment.

After the failure of the Fifth Crusade in 1218, however, wherein the Christians attacked the world symbol of Muslim wealth and power, Egypt herself, a shaky truce was established between Islam and Christianity — one that crossed the veil of life and death. Christian Ventrue lords and their Frankish vassals

in the West needed enough time to gather together another, more organized (and feasible) crusade, and a truce with the embittered Assamites and their Muslim charge was the only means by which this could be accomplished. Earlier, the Followers of Set had nearly been successful in their attempt to use the tide of the Crusades against their enemies in Egypt. Meanwhile, the Assamites grew doubly enraged at the duplicity of the ignorant Franks, whom they wrongly believed would have been smart enough to avoid any dealings with the Serpents.

This truce lasted just long enough for the new Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick II, to enter the picture with an agenda of his own. He foresaw a unified, Christian Outremer under the banner of his own empire, and he began an organized campaign effort to squeeze oaths of fealty and vassalage from the various land-holding Frankish barons. He granted numerous fiefs in Outremer to German barons and sought to increase the power of the Teutonic Knights, who were exempted from taxation in 1226 and upon whom the emperor recently gifted the former royal palace on the Street of the Armenians in Jerusalem. German Ventrue and Roman Lasombra quietly encouraged these “diplomatic” efforts, while Genoese, Venetian and Pisan interests (such as many of the more independent-minded among the Lasombra, as well as the newly emergent Giovanni family) chafed at the emperor’s self-important designs. Still, many of Outremer’s Cainites (as well as kine) had grown weary of the endless feuding, having suffered numerous losses due to vicious in-fighting and the overall fractionating of the Christian cause, and they were thirsty for the unity and leadership that Frederick and his plan represented. Therefore, many of Outremer’s Christian Cainites came together in their support of the Emperor Frederick at the time, pursuant to his following through on all the promises he (and his Cainite supporters) had made during the long campaign.

With the recent return of Jerusalem to Christian hands, however, bitter feuding has returned to Outremer. Many in the Frankish nobility resented Emperor Frederick’s casual assumption of the crown of Jerusalem after negotiating the return of the Holy City. Upon the death of his wife, Frederick was no longer king by virtue of being married to a queen, but simply the guardian of the infant king, Conrad. As was their right, the barons would have been entitled to refuse him the regency if they desired — had they been asked one way or the other. And two of the most powerful barons in Outremer, Bohemond of Antioch

BY ANY OTHER NAME

In the time since the establishment of the first Crusader Kingdoms in Palestine, the conquering Franks have referred to the entirety of the Holy Land as “Outremer.” The word itself has its origins in French, indicating a perimeter area and roughly translating to a catch-all phrase meaning “beyond the sea.” The term eventually falls out of usage following the collapse of the Latin kingdom in 1291.

and John of Ibelin, acknowledged no overlord — least of all Emperor Frederick II.

This disunity has echoed in the affairs of the undead. While officially cut off from Rome since his excommunication, Frederick’s campaign posed much less of a threat to the power base of Outremer’s Cainites. But with the emperor’s recent reconciliation with the pope through the Treaty of San Germano, he now has the full support of Rome once again (in theory), making him a true threat to Outremer’s overall sense of independence. In the wake of this renunciation, many Cainites have begun to scramble for whatever they can take from one another, leaving the Outremer of 1230 a land of swirling questions... and opportunities.

Castles Made of Sand

The Christian territories of Outremer, the so-called “Crusader Kingdoms,” are nothing more than feudal baronies and fiefdoms, passed around between Frankish nobles in exchange for fiduciary remuneration and/or favorable consideration at the High Court. In the early days of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, all landed estates in Outremer (and their governing lords) theoretically ruled on behalf of the king, as was typical of the feudal system. As is also typical, however, the theory played out better than the practice — as the current state of squabbling can attest. With the recent and growing rift between the kings of Outremer and the Holy Roman Emperor, few nobles are certain where their ultimate loyalties should lie, beyond themselves and their own interests.

The Cainite situation is only slightly more stable. As with the mortals, many vampiric lords act as vassals to older, more distinguished individuals, most often their sires. In Outremer, however, many of these Cainite lieges rule not from a castle



in a neighboring domain, but from distant lands as far afield as Constantinople and the Holy Roman Empire. The subsequent isolation and separation often results in a feeling of liberation — however fleeting — on the part of the vassal, and some have taken to working toward undermining their lieges' interests in the hopes that they may one night rule their own domains. This situation is partly why so many landed nobles are currently up in arms about Emperor Frederick's interference in their affairs. His presence and activities are a thin disguise for the efforts of embittered Western lieges to restore order and control to the "colonies" once more.

In broad strokes, the land of Outremer is composed of four main domains in 1230, and nearly all vampiric and mortal residents of each must pay at least a nominal fealty to their respective overlords. In the east lies the Kingdom of Jerusalem, which includes both the city itself as well as surrounding territories such as Jaffa and Bethlehem. To the north, the principality of Antioch-Tripoli comprises those two neighboring city-states. The southern Kingdom of Acre encompasses the coastal cities of Acre and Tyre, and sitting aloof to the west of the mainland, the Mediterranean island of Cyprus.

The Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem

In the early days of Outremer, the Kingdom of Jerusalem was the blanket term for the Christian holdings in the Holy Land. After the city itself fell in 1099, the Catholic patriarchy assisted in encouraging the growth of the new Christian kingdom, and many new Christians soon immigrated to the area, providing the kingdom with a diverse population of Greek Orthodox, Syrian, Armenian, Georgian, Jacobite and Nestorian Christians. Many of these immigrant workers chose to live inside the safety of the walled city, but with the expansion of the kingdom during subsequent Crusades, many seized the opportunity to take land in the surrounding areas as well.

With the arrival of Salah al-Din, however, the Christian hold on Jerusalem came to an end, and Jerusalem finally returned to Muslim hands in 1187. For 40 years, the Christians chafed at the loss of their capital and home until finally, in 1228, Emperor Frederick II negotiated for the kingdom's return. According to the terms of his treaty with Sultan al-Kamil, Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth were

MORTALS

Frederick II — Holy Roman Emperor. Recent actions, including the treaty that resulted in the return of the Holy City and his subsequent self-coronation as “King of Jerusalem,” have been universally denounced by the nobility of Outremer.

John of Ibelin — King of Acre and one of the most powerful men of Outremer. He is currently at odds with the Emperor Frederick, who desires to relieve all Ibelins of their lands and holdings in the Holy Land.

King Henry I — Boy-king of Cyprus. John of Ibelin acts as his regent until 1232, whereupon he reaches his 15th year and thus assumes sole sovereignty.

Bohemond of Antioch — Ruler of the county of Tripoli and the neighboring principality of Antioch. His internecine intrigues with his fellow lords and barons resulted in Antioch-Tripoli’s exclusion from the emperor’s recently signed 10-year truce with the Muslims.

Conrad IV of Hohenstaufen — King of Jerusalem in absentia, and young son of Emperor Frederick II through Isabelle of Brienne. Jerusalem is currently governed by the emperor’s two appointed *bailli*, Balian of Sidon and Garnier the German.

Albert of Rezzato — Patriarch of Antioch and recently appointed Papal Legate for all the East. His word carries considerable sway with all Christians in Outremer, Cainite or kine.

to be restored to the Christians, along with a narrow strip of land — known as the “Oultrejourdain” — connecting the kingdom to the sea at Jaffa. This land included towns such as Toron and Montfort by default, as well as all the previously Muslim-held areas around Sidon.

The Holy City

Many in Jerusalem believed that the First Crusade would never survive the transition from dream into reality. They, too, had heard the rumors drifting in from the West, but by and large chose to disregard

CAINITES

Qawiyya el-Ghaduba — (5th-generation warrior Salubri) Architect of the Diet of Olives and the true power behind the throne in the Kingdom of Jerusalem.

Lucius Trebius Rufus — (6th-generation Ventrue) Nominal Prince of Jerusalem. He somewhat resents the Diet’s influence over the Holy City, but he patiently bides his time, gathering Christian support for his leadership while he waits for the dust to settle.

Etienne de Faubergé — (7th-generation Bashirite Ravnos) Prince of Acre and, until the Diet of Olives, a willing vassal of the Teutonic Ventrue, Lord Jürgen.


Ahmed ibn Zayyat — (7th-generation vizier Assamite) The Christian Prince of Tripoli and a founding member of the Spear of Destiny. Claims titular control (through a vassal) over the Cainites of nearby Antioch as well.

Zarathustra — (5th-generation Lasombra) The true power and Prince of Antioch. Therefore, it is actually Tripoli and not Antioch that is more the “vassal” state. A staunch supporter of the Diet of Olives.

Tanith — (5th-generation Baali) Shadow ruler of Tyre and a powerful player across all the lands of Outremer. Currently attempting to woo Nehemiah of Cyprus to her cause.

Nehemiah — (6th-generation Brujah) Lord of the domain of Cyprus. Although he is just as disinterested in the Crusades as he is in petty Cainite politicking, he strongly enforces the Old Ways on “his” island and severely punishes any Cainite transgressors.

them as papal grandstanding. In the months leading up to the First Crusade, however, when the truth of their fate became suddenly and unmistakably apparent, the citizens of Jerusalem — both Cainite and kine — fell into a terrible panic. Some among the undead knew of the bloodshed to come and sought to warn their fellows. Others played politics, parlaying favors with Christian authorities in exchange for amnesty during and after the siege. One of those latter, a Christian Brujah named Etheria, used her knowledge of the crusader agenda as an opportunity to ingratiate the other Cainites of Jerusalem to herself, granting safe



haven to all who would accept it inside her domain of Bethlehem, just south of the Holy City.

While some accepted Etheria's offer, many did not, which left them stranded inside the city when an army of bloodthirsty crusaders arrived at the gates in July of 1099. After finally breaching the city walls, the knights of the Cross stormed through the city like a devil wind, laying waste to all in sight. The crusaders slaughtered without selection or mercy, staking their claim to any home they so desired simply by murdering its previous owner and placing their personal shields upon the door. Some 70,000 men, women and children were put to the sword in the first week alone.

During this time, nearly all of the remaining Cainites in Jerusalem succumbed to a massive blood-borne frenzy. They went mad, clawing and tearing with wild abandon until nothing remained of their victim and then moving on to a new target, letting the precious blood slip away into the streets. Even peaceful Cainites were seen ravaging one another. Brother set upon brother, and no single family or clan seemed immune. The madness was everywhere and all-consuming. Cainites even forgot to flee to their havens as dawn approached, and many met grisly, shrieking ends at sunrise. The waking nightmare that was Jerusalem at this time became known as the Weeks of Blood. (For more on Jerusalem and the Weeks of Blood, see **Jerusalem by Night** and its sister-story, **Fountains of Bright Crimson**.)

After the terror subsided, Cainites slowly began to return to Jerusalem alongside the gradual influx of mortals. While the city rebuilt, several prominent Cainites rose to positions of influence within the city. Among these was a Christian Lasombra named Paliuro Rustucci. A former Roman Catholic priest. Rustucci was popular among the Christian Cainites of Jerusalem for his unflinching attitudes on the "infidels" and his equally unflinching stance on the status of the Holy City. At one time, the Lasombra fanatic saw himself as the Prince of Jerusalem — a claim supported by no few of his "subjects" — but the mad Lasombra has fallen considerably since then.

When the five-year truce between Salah al-Din and Richard the Lion-Hearted ended in late 1197, Rustucci began to fade from the public eye in earnest. He had long since ceased involving himself directly in Cainite affairs, and was now drawing evermore inward, growing obsessed with his own exploration of the divine. From his haven beneath the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Rustucci has been conducting terrifying experiments upon himself and upon

mortals, ghouls, other Cainites and anyone else he can ensnare. One of his long-standing enemies, an Assamite named Habeeba al-Sikkeen ("the knife"), is beginning to suspect Rustucci of his practices and is currently debating following one or more of his lackeys to determine where the Lasombra sleeps. If she is successful in this, she hopes one night to drink deep of the mad Lasombra's vitae, thereby strengthening the power of her own blood. Like many among her clan, Habeeba has developed a taste for the Amaranth, having diablerized several Cainites already — including the Brujah elder Etheria as punishment for her thoughtless garnering of favors in the wake of the First Crusade.

With the return of Jerusalem to Christian control, a new political figurehead for the undead has stepped forward. His name is Lucius Trebius Rufus, a Ventrue with significant ties to the Military Orders, particularly the Knights Hospitaller. As a mortal, Rufus hailed from southern Italy's minor aristocracy, but he did not find his true calling until arriving in the Holy City as one of the undead. Throughout his time in residence, he has worked to keep the city safe and sanctified at all costs, and was instrumental in the return of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre to the Greek Orthodox Church in 1187. He resents his old nemesis, Paliuro Rustucci, and he was secretly pleased to see him bear witness to Rufus's own coronation as Prince of Jerusalem in the spring of 1229.

Rufus appreciates the fact that Jerusalem was returned to Christian control without bloodshed and thus continues to support the Diet of Olives, even though in so doing, he realizes that he is tacitly acknowledging the Salubri's preeminence in the Holy City over his own. Nonetheless, the two seem to have some similar goals (although their methods surely differ), including thwarting the plans of the Bashirite Ravnos Varsik — Jerusalem's resident paragon of the Road of Paradox — at every turn. So for now, the old Ventrue has decided to wait and to act in this matter much as he strives to act in all things: with honor.

The Principality of Antioch-Tripoli

To be precise, only Antioch is the actual principality, while neighboring Tripoli is a county. The entire region, which includes various smaller coastal cities such as Lattakieh and Marqab, is the province of Bohemond of Antioch — a stubborn ruler

with very clear-cut (and insular) notions of land, leadership and the entitlement of both. Geographically speaking, the unified title “Antioch-Tripoli” is somewhat misleading. Tripoli is just as far removed from its sister-city to the north as she is from Acre, further south. Nevertheless, the political fates of the two have been linked for decades now, and they will remain so right up until the fall of the entire Latin kingdom.

In the year 1230, the principality finds itself politically cut off from the rest of Outremer. This is due in no small part to its leader’s outright refusal to capitulate to Emperor Frederick’s decrees. Bohemond of Antioch believes that he can maintain his power base through careful negotiation with his neighbors, the Seljuk Turks, the Armenians and the powerful Knights Templar, to whom he has worked to ingratiate himself for many years. It is a dangerous game Bohemond plays, and one that could ultimately leave him and his territory teetering on the edge of ruin.

Antioch

What is now the principality of Antioch is one of the most famous sites in all Palestine. Located about 20 miles inland from the Mediterranean Sea, it was the third largest city in the Roman Empire during the

time of Jesus Christ. Antioch is the ancient site of Saint Paul’s first sermon, and according to the Bible, the first place in history where people who followed Christ’s teachings became known as Christians.

The Antioch of the 13th century is a far different place than its Biblical predecessor, but it is arguably no less important to the Holy Land. Its fertile plains provide a constant source of nourishment to the citizens of Outremer. Indeed, were it not for the Oultrejourdain, Antioch would be the sole provider of many of the kingdom’s needs. Surrounding the city itself is a beautiful patchwork of orchards and vegetable gardens, and the olive-groves dotting the hillsides are as familiar to the eye as they are pleasing. Although it is not seaside itself, Antioch is also an important port-city for Outremer, as the rich merchants of Aleppo use Saint Symeon for their trade — a port accessible only by passing through Antioch.

Since before the birth of Christ, Antioch has been the quiet domain of a powerful Lasombra Methuselah — the legendary scholar-philosopher, Zarathustra. Embraced by a childe of Lasombra himself during his travels alongside Alexander the Great’s armies in Central Asia, he has claimed Antioch as his traditional domain for more than a millennium. Although he does allow other Cainites to reside within Antioch itself, this is only a relatively recent development,



THE DIET OF OLIVES

In December of 1228, after the last Muslim ruler had fled Jerusalem, a convocation of Cainites met on the Mount of Olives outside the Holy City. Its inceptor, a Muslim warrior Salubri named Qawiyya el-Ghaduba, had a vision for Outremer — one she wanted to share with the leading Cainites of the area — and the time was right for its implementation.

The Salubri warrior had appeared in Jerusalem a mere handful of years earlier, but with her came righteous retribution. She met with an aged Salubri healer named Nahum ben Enosh — a childe of Saulot himself — and with his aid, contrived to rid the Holy Land of the foul presence of those who would flaunt the will of God. The Tremere of Jerusalem, who had been steadily growing in power and influence up until then, knew nothing of this pact and were caught completely unaware when the two Salubri finally took up arms. All the resident Cainites of the Jerusalem chantry simply disappeared one night, their ghouls and mortal servitors mystically freed from any obligations (blood-borne or otherwise) they may have had to Clan Tremere. Only a single Gargoyle servant, a beautiful creature named Rusticus, was spared.

To everyone's surprise but her own, every Cainite lord who had been issued an invitation did indeed respond to the Salubri's call. From Acre came the Ravnos prince himself, Etienne de Faubergé, a devout Christian who seemed to immediately grasp the meaning and intent of the Diet. From Antioch came Zakariah, vassal and childe of Ahmed ibn Zayyat, the Assamite Prince of Tripoli. Rafqa, the Brujah Prince of Beirut, arrived in person. The Salubri were honored by the presence of their compatriot from Jerusalem, an elder Malkavian named Shahnazar who had risen to considerable influence in the Holy City since it returned to Muslim hands in 1187. And from far-off Cyprus arrived an unnamed ghoul in service to Nehemiah — a silent witness to the proceedings. Of all of Outremer's influential domains, only the court at Tyre — that of the Lasombra Prince

Nicolao — did not have a representative at the Diet, and this only because no word had been sent to Tyre in the first place. (The Salubri never did reveal to the others why Tyre had been passed over).

In a large villa on a hill at the foot of the mount (the former location of the Tremere chantry, in fact), the Cainites and their entourages assembled. For three nights, all in attendance were the guests of the Salubri who fully guaranteed both comfort and security. A large, quiet and hooded figure tended to any and all needs during the meeting, moving deftly between the crowded assembly and just as quickly fading from view once more.

When it was all over, the Cainite lords of the greatest cities of Outremer had signed a pact that they agreed would last for a minimum of 10 years — the length of the truce reached between Emperor Frederick and Sultan al-Kamil. The terms were simple and threefold. First, mutual non-aggression was to be observed between all the Cainites involved (and their vassals and lieges) for the duration of the treaty. Second, all parties involved would endeavor to share any and all information pertaining to the Baali and/or those who would come to the Holy Land to plunder its faith or treasures, lending support to actions against said individuals where possible. Finally, no Cainite lord involved would agree to grant the hospitality of his or her domain to any transgressors of the above rules. (The Salubri eventually managed to convince all in attendance that the Tremere almost always fell into this category.)

The Diet was a great success. Everyone present had not only signed, but also seemed willing to trust that the others involved would adhere to the treaty's terms, in both letter and in spirit. The only exception was in the representative from Cyprus, who had been instructed not to make any concessions or sign any treaties on behalf of his Cainite liege. The ghoul merely took note of the Diet's conclusions and quietly departed, having uttered no more than a handful of words during the entirety of the convocation.

stemming from the arrival of Zakariah, an Assamite vizier and childe of the Prince of Tripoli. Through Zakariah, the Methuselah can accomplish many of his socio-political goals while staying invisible to the Cainite community at large. Indeed, only Zakariah and his sire (as well as Zarathustra's own network of progeny and ghouls) know of the Methuselah's existence.

Zarathustra's primary concern is and has always been the status, well-being, and future of Antioch itself. He takes any steps necessary to ensure that the sanctity of his domain remains undisturbed, and he has often resorted to extreme measures to accomplish this ultimate, yet ongoing goal. Numerous Cainites have met their end at his hands without ever having realized who their assailant was or even why it was he had singled them out for elimination. Indeed, few who have fallen victim to his devious schemes (and survived to tell the tale) ever came to understand the full complexity of their involvement in Antioch's affairs — or how lucky they were to escape with their unives.

The County of Tripoli

Located roughly between Antioch and Acre is the coastal city of Tripoli. In AD 1230, Tripoli is still an important port city, serving both in-country interests and those abroad. It has been the primary port of Homs for some time by this point. Theoretically, Tripoli is governed by a count of its own (being a county), but it is often politically overshadowed by its sister-city to the north. This paradigm shifted most dramatically in 1220, when then Count of Tripoli — one Bohemond IV — recaptured Antioch for himself, leaving its former ruler Prince Raymond-Roupen to die in captivity in Tarsus. Bohemond's accession sparked much debate among the nobles of Outremer, and his subsequent dealings have jeopardized all those within his domain. Nonetheless, he is a savvy statesman, and Tripoli continues to thrive under his governance (even though he has retired to take up residence in Antioch).

Ever since the fall of Tripoli to the Christians — ever since the county became an official part of the Latin kingdom in the Holy Land — Tripoli's undead have answered to an Assamite vizier named Ahmed ibn Zayyat. Although raised a Muslim and Embraced by a Muslim Assamite, ibn Zayyat went through an experience that altered the course of his unlife while he was still a neonate. He claims to have received a divine revelation which instructed him on the path

of true righteousness, and he has been committed to following that path ever since. Many among his own clan consider him a traitor to the cause, as he is a devout and vocal proponent of Christ's divinity, but ibn Zayyat himself shows no sectarian favoritism, a fact that has earned him many allies among Outremer's religiously minded Cainites. Although Ibn Zayyat will not relate the circumstances or details of his revelation to any Cainite, the power of his conviction is apparent to any and all who stand in his presence. Under his aegis, the Faithful Cainites of Antioch-Tripoli have found guidance in these dark times.

In the early nights after his conversion to Christianity, ibn Zayyat was lost in a sea of loneliness and doubt, and only his faith in his revelation kept him going. That was when he came to the attention of Zarathustra, the enigmatic patron of Antioch. The Lasombra elder saw a bravery and dedication in ibn Zayyat that he admired, and he offered his considerable wisdom and council to the beleaguered Assamite, taking him in and teaching him of the history of this land and its Cainite parasites and paragons. When ibn Zayyat at last returned home to Tripoli, he did so once again changed.

As Prince of Tripoli, ibn Zayyat is using his growing power and influence to accomplish a number of related goals. First, he strives to keep his finger always on the pulse of the tumultuous mortal situation, as changes to the Palestinian landscape come fast and violent. Second, he uses the guidance of his Magister mentor to uncover and eliminate any parties or individuals who seek to rob the Holy Land of its sacred religious relics, either through theft or outright desecration. And lastly, ibn Zayyat aims to bring all "Cainites of the Book" together. Faith is faith, and he believes that his message is the only hope for survival for many of Outremer's quarreling factions. To this end, he is fast becoming one of the most active participants in the Diet of Olives.

The Kingdom of Acre

The Second Kingdom of Jerusalem, as it is known, emerged after the Holy City fell to Salah al-Din's army following the disastrous battle at Hattin in 1187. The Latin kingdom had lost not only its capitol city, but, as part of the ransom paid for King Guy de Lusignan, the port of Ascalon as well. In response, Guy immediately broke his word to Salah al-Din regarding future military action, moving south

to Acre and laying siege to it in 1188. After nearly three years, Acre fell to the Christians, becoming thenceforth the new capitol of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem.

The kingdom itself comprises only a narrow strip of land between the River Jordan and the Sea of Galilee, bordered by the Mediterranean Sea in the west. Theoretically, it includes the city of Tyre and all the smaller villages between, but recent skirmishes have reduced this claim to mere nominal status. In the year 1230, the kingdom truly consists of only the city itself and the island kingdom of Cyprus, where John of Ibelin is also regent.

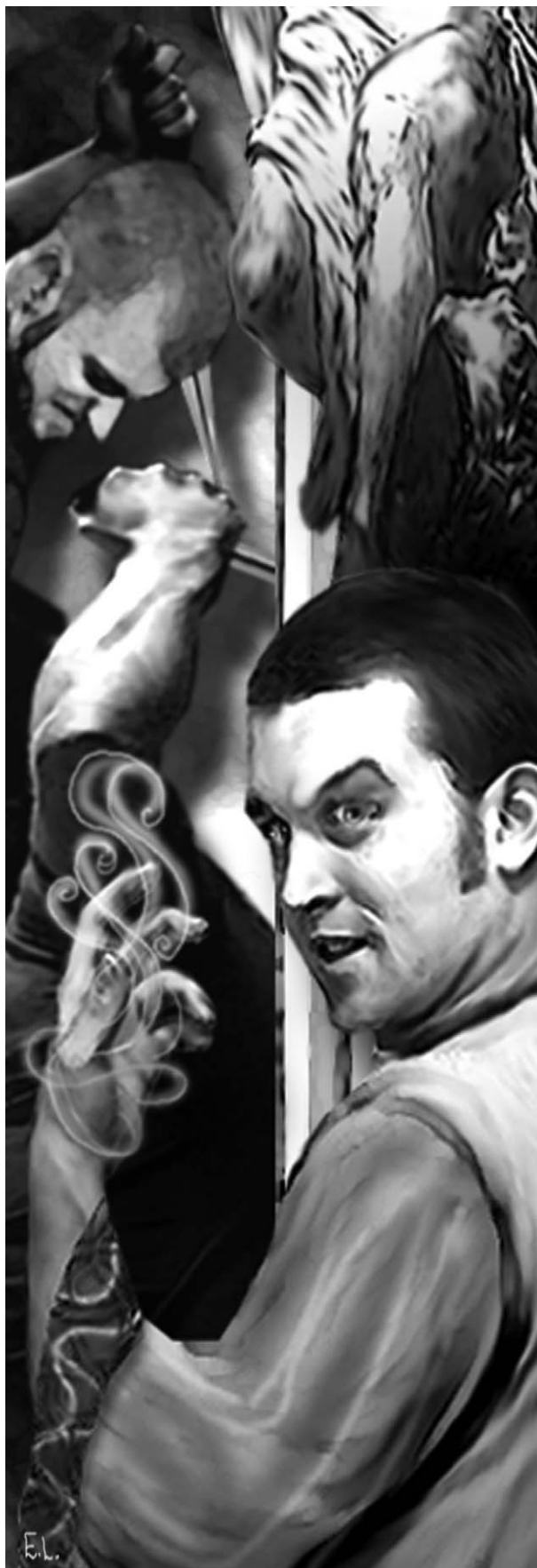
Acre

Acre is often considered by many to be the jewel of Outremer, outshining even the glory of old Jerusalem herself. Ever since the Christian re-conquest of Acre in 1191, pilgrims from all over have come to view Acre as Outremer's true bastion of Christianity, and for good reason. With its broad thoroughfares, secure towers and bustling harbor, the city has much to offer those who seek some much-needed respite in a harsh and foreign land.

Nevertheless, Acre is a cosmopolitan medieval center, with separate districts for each of its distinguished trading houses, including the Genoese, the Pisans and the Venetians. Under a standing agreement with the King of Jerusalem, each of these groups is allowed to govern its quarter under its own consuls. This is not problematic in and of itself, but the groups are also permitted to *police* their own, using a watch made up of men of their own choosing. This arrangement has led to some serious in-fighting among the trading houses, each of whom believes the others to be abusing their "police" for their own purposes.

Before the recent return of Jerusalem to Christian hands (and, indeed, even since then), Acre was also home to many of Christianity's military orders. Two in particular, the Knights of Saint Thomas of Acre and the Teutonic Knights, had their beginnings here, in fact, and the two most distinguished of the military orders — the Templars and the Knights Hospitaller — moved their bases of operations to Acre after the Holy City fell to Islam. This is as much a bane as it is a boon, however, as special considerations from Rome have essentially freed these orders to do as they please. So much free will in one city is never good for general stability or for the rule of law.

To the undead, Acre has long been synonymous with pain and revulsion. The very faith that drew so



OUTREMER AND THE TRUE CROSS

When King Richard the Lion-Hearted successfully laid siege to Acre in 1191, one of the terms of Muslim surrender was the return of the True Cross — allegedly the one upon which Christ Himself had been crucified. The Muslims had taken possession of it when they took Jerusalem, and the issue had become a Christian rallying point ever since. Salah al-Din assured Richard's representative that the Cross and all Christian prisoners would be returned, so long as the Muslim garrison at Acre was spared. When Richard refused to keep his word after the first payment of money and prisoners had been made, however, Salah al-Din likewise refused to give anything further until the Muslims were released. Slighted, Richard ordered all 2,700 Muslim soldiers executed then departed for Jerusalem.

After the Acre massacre, Salah al-Din used the True Cross as a bitter bargaining chip with the Franks. He threatened several times to destroy it, and he kept its current location a tightly guarded secret wherever he went in Outremer. He did so for two reasons. First, although the Cross held no intrinsic value to Islam, Salah al-Din knew only too well the object's importance to the crusaders, and he wanted to fill his enemies with fear that they would be powerless to prevent it from coming to harm. Second, the Saracen leader did not want anyone in the Christian camp to discover the truth about the True Cross:

He never really had it.

The real True Cross, or rather, the various pieces of it, had long since been scattered throughout the Holy Land. Almost immediately after the death of Christ, the Cross was broken up into smaller shards, and each piece was entrusted to a different disciple (each an Apostle of Christ, so the legends say). They then carried it off to a different destination, that it might never fall into infidel hands. Some time during the first century, Saint Paul brought the first and largest of these fragments to the city of Acre, and there it remained for almost 1,200 years until its removal in 1212 by a band of Christian soldiers. These knights take the fragment to Cyprus, and soon rise as the Poor Knights of the Passion of the Cross of Acre (much to the dismay of many of Europe's Cainites).

The sad truth of all the terrible battles and all the lives that have been lost over time due to this relic, particularly at Acre, is that it was already there.

HE OF THE LION'S HEART


The Christian siege of Acre in 1191 is often remembered as one of the great sieges of all time. All told, the rescue of Acre from the Saracens took nearly two years of constant toil, at a cost of scores of Frankish ships and thousands of Christian lives. Nonetheless, once the siege was underway, it did provide a unique opportunity for the Christian Cainites of Outremer. High-blooded Cainites of all stripes agreed to put aside their differences for a time, riding in under the banner of the Templars and Hospitalers to assist in the siege. To them, it was a golden opportunity to prove the worthiness of their clan and cause, as well as the potency of their collective metal, and the effort paid off in the end. On July 11, against Salah al-Din's wishes, the Muslim garrison capitulated. Acre was returned to Christian hands once more.

It was the epic stuff of which the legends of Richard the Lion-Hearted and "Saladin" were made. Unfortunately, the truth is often far grimmer than the legend. In this case, the "noble" Christian king was to ruin any grace with which he had won his campaign upon the surrender of his enemies. Frustrated by Salah al-Din's stubbornness and eager to embark for Jerusalem, Richard ordered that the 2,700 survivors of the Muslim garrison be executed on the spot as "a lesson" to his conquered opponent. And there on the shores of Acre's great harbor, as the sun set upon the glittering waters of the Mediterranean, the remnants of the Muslim army were lined up for slaughter.

One of the soldiers, a Muslim of Syrian descent named Mukhtar al-Dimshaq, stood bravely to face his death. His son, Ramzy, was forced to look on as they prepared his father for execution, and although he had been warned to stay back, the boy rushed forward, throwing his arms around his father and pleading, "No, you must not! Execute me instead!" Amused by the boy's courage, the crusaders decided to take him up on his offer and slit Ramzy's throat right before his father's eyes. They then fell upon Mukhtar as well. When the deed was done, they tossed father and son onto a shoreline piled high with bodies and left them both for the crows.

Shortly thereafter, an unknown Assamite awoke to discover the carnage that the crusaders had wrought during the day. As he traced the perimeter of the Aura in awe, he heard a stifled gurgle from nearby and rushed to find Ramzy still alive, lying beneath his father's corpse. In a desperate rage, the Assamite did the only thing left to do: He embraced the dying boy and fled with him back to Alamut. There, the boy learned of his heritage and of his place in the clan. He accepted his role as the protector of his people and vowed to return one night and liberate Acre from the tyranny of the invaders.

In the year 1212, when the fragment of the True Cross was removed from Acre, thus opening up the city to the Children of Caine once more, Ramzy ibn Mukhtar knew that his time had finally come.



many pious mortals to the safety of her mighty walls forbade Cainites from venturing into Acre. This presence of the divine — known to the undead as simply “the Aura” — extended as far as the harbor, forcing most Cainites traveling by boat to land 15 miles further south, at Haifa. For centuries, any vampire who came near the city would suffer a most excruciating pain, and even death, if she drew too near. Even particularly amoral or powerful ghouls felt the aura’s oppressive heat upon their souls. Yet everything changed suddenly on a warm, summer night in the year 1212, and Acre hasn’t been the same since (see the “Outremer and the True Cross” sidebar).

Acre’s Cainite population has been governed for many years now by a Bashirite Ravnos named Etienne de Faubergé, childe of Varsik of Jerusalem. Before the disappearance of the Aura, however, de Faubergé was a prince without a real domain, as even he could not enter the city unharmed. Among his enemies, he was coldly referred to as the “Prince of Dirt.” He held court within a large caravansary on the sandy plain outside the city.

For many years, de Faubergé ruled Acre in the name of his sire. Yet, the loss of the fragment of the True Cross in 1212 and his childe’s overall failure to make any progress in Acre on behalf of the Bashirite agenda resulted in Varsik’s extreme displeasure. Fearing the worst, de Faubergé swore an oath of fealty to the Prince of Magdeburg, the Teutonic Ventrue Lord Jürgen the Sword-Bearer, in order to save his own hide. Under the protection of Lord Jürgen, the Ravnos could remain reasonably secure in his status as prince, while keeping his embittered sire at arm’s length.

In recent years, however, the Prince of Acre has started looking elsewhere for support. Although he respects Lord Jürgen and whole-heartedly believes in the Christian cause, he resents having to be vassal to a Hungarian overlord who cares nothing for the true essence of Christianity. The appearance of Qawiyya el-Ghaduba signaled his first opportunity to get out from beneath the heavy aegis of Lord Jürgen. When the Salubri called the Diet of Olives, de Faubergé recognized the escape he had been looking for. Indeed, he was the first to sign the agreement. With the guaranteed support of Outremer’s most powerful Cainites, the Ravnos now feels secure enough to rule Acre alone, and he no longer feels the need for the “protection” of ogres like Lord Jürgen. Still, discretion is always the better part of valor (particularly for the likes of Etienne de Faubergé), and the Ravnos bides

his time for now, waiting for the right moment to cut the cord with Magdeburg. (For more on Acre and Etienne de Faubergé, see **Under the Black Cross**.)

The Tower of Flies

Jutting out into the Mediterranean like an outstretched arm is a long earthen jetty, at the end of which stands a tall, forbidding structure made of white stone. Mortals used this structure, called the Tower of Flies, as the first line of defense against naval assault. Indeed, the tower became known for its inability to be taken down, regardless of the punishment inflicted upon it, and numerous sieges were repelled from the harbor using the tower as a base of operations.

In Acre’s earliest nights, the city had been a province of the dreaded Baali. After Saint Paul’s arrival, however, the Baali (along with all other local Cainites) were forced to evacuate, lest they subject themselves to the Aura’s effects. But several enterprising Baali noticed that the edge of the Aura’s power faded halfway into the harbor, just before the jetty and the tower, thus giving brave Cainites room to operate free from harm within. The Baali immediately set up shop in the lower levels (including a small cavern of rooms beneath the water line itself), using it as a fortress on the front lines of the war with the Divine. The arrival of the crusaders, however, brought even more pious Cainites to Acre, and the Baali had to abandon the tower in favor of more hospitable environs elsewhere.

Tyre, City of Mysteries

As one of Outremer’s largest port cities, Tyre is a cosmopolitan center of trade and commerce in the East. It is the wellspring of two of Outremer’s most important native products — sugar and a fabric known as “zendado.” Almost all the sugar consumed in Europe at this time comes from Outremer, and from Tyre in particular. The rivalry here between Venice and Genoa (and to a lesser extent, Pisa) is at its fiercest, with each house constantly angling for an edge of the other. Venetian interests are overseen by the meticulous personage of one Fiorello Giovanni, a calculating taskmaster of a Cainite and, if the rumors are correct, one of Augustus Giovanni’s personal prodigies. Despite Fiorello’s grim determination, however, truly the biggest supporter of this intense feud between Tyrian trade houses is and has always been the city’s secret masters, the Baali.

Since 800 years before the birth of Christ, Tyre has been the private domain of an elder Baali named

Tanith, first and most beloved of the childer of Andramelech. In the glory days of Tyre, when the Baali ruled openly and uncontested, she was known for her vast understanding of unclean secrets. Indeed, she became the first of a sect within the bloodline known as the Keepers of Mystery — those Baali dedicated to preserving ancient and forbidden knowledge from the mind of man. She was there when her sire and many others emigrated to the blossoming dream that was nascent city of Carthage in 800 BC. At the request of her sire, she stayed behind to rule Tyre in his place and name until he could return. Unfortunately, he never would. Andramelech's pride had blinded him to the truth, bidding him to remain in the doomed city long after its fate had been sealed, and Tanith was forced to watch powerless from afar as her sire fell during the Roman sack of Carthage in the second century before Christ.

It was then that Tanith vowed never to allow the same thing to happen to her in her own domain. In 332 BC, she used Alexander the Great's armies as a bloody purifier, bidding them enter her city uncontested and "cleanse" it of all those who would stand in the way of her vision for the future. After the tide of change had receded, Tanith emerged from her secret island haven and began to rebuild the city of Tyre — the City of Mysteries. She has been a fixture here ever since, the softly gliding shadow beneath the cool waters of the Mediterranean.

The city's current Cainite leadership, a Lasombra named Nicolao, has been in league with the city's Baali queen for the duration of his reign. The Lasombra prince is the head of a long chain of command beginning and ending with Tyrian sea-captains. An entire fleet of vessels rests at Nicolao's disposal, many of which are helmed by his own childer or by those who are fully indoctrinated into his service. Few of the corsairs at his command realize that Nicolao himself is vassal to another, however, and that is just how the Lasombra likes it. And for as long as Tanith gives him leave to run his affairs as he sees fit, the arrangement remains an amicable one. He knows that he cannot cross her directly — he has seen the frightful evidence of her power — but he will not stand to see his political or commercial authority questioned, at least not openly.

Tanith's biggest problems in Tyre stem not from her relations with its prince, however, but from two diametrically opposed sources — one from without, the other from within. The former involves the noxious presence of the Divine, and those who would carry its work into her domain. To the northeast

BLACK MARIAH

One night in the year 1205, shortly after the sack of far-off Constantinople, Tanith received a visitor at her island haven — a hooded figure possessed of soot-colored skin and with eyes like dying embers. She called herself Ma-ri-ah and claimed to be Baali. She needed no introduction, however, as Cainites across Europe had heard of the blood hunt called upon the one known as Mary the Black for the murder of the Toreador Methuselah, Michael. Ma-ri-ah appealed for sanctuary in the house of her sister in sin, and Tanith pleasantly agreed.

For her part, Tanith is curious as to what will become of Tyre now that she has a partner, of similar lineage and comparable power. Her first intent was to use her position as "Mother of the Hive" in Tyre to demand certain tasks of her Baali guest. The various military orders and their pious Cainite supporters were becoming a thorn in Tanith's side of late, and this "Black Mariah" would be the perfect foil to use against them. Now she is not so sure, though. In the last twenty-five years since Mariah's arrival, Tanith has grown somewhat fond of her houseguest, in a twisted sort of way. For now, she continues to give her guest free reign and even allow her to lead some of the important rites taking place on the mainland. In time, she will learn how best to utilize this marvelous gift that fate has brought to her door.

Mariah's presence has also served to remind Tanith of just how alone she had been for so long. Unfortunately, she let that loneliness drive her to Embrace a young woman who later betrayed her.

of Tyre, outside the city walls, is a lonely hill atop which sits a small castle whose parapets overlook the river Litani. Once used as a stronghold of the Knights Templar, the castle — called the Riviera de la Lune — was purchased through intermediaries by the Order of Bitter Ashes after a series of brutal Saracen attacks caused the Templars in residence to abandon it entirely. The long-forgotten keep is now home to a Grail Knight named Theobald and his faithful entourage. A former Nosferatu antiquarian, Theobald earned the Grail Embrace after discovering a reliquary containing direct copies of the epistles of Saint Luke, discussing the treatment of various super-

natural curses. He suspects the nearby city of Tyre of housing some ancient evil and is currently mounting a campaign of reconnoitering sojourns inside the city. Although he has tried to remain circumspect in his efforts, Theobald's activities have been detected by Tanith's agents in the city. Barring some unforeseen intercession on the part of someone very brave, it is only a matter of time before the elder Baali queen engineers the Grail Knight's fall from grace. (For more on Grail Knights and the Order of Bitter Ashes, see **The Ashen Knight**.)

Tanith's second concern of late involves a beautiful Syrian girl named Shutatara. After the arrival of Black Mariah, Tanith became acutely aware that although she had accumulated much power and knowledge, she had no one to teach or to mentor. Shutatara impressed the Baali queen from afar by displaying an innate facility with languages and a voracious appetite for learning, and thus became her first protégé (and progeny) in centuries. Unfortunately, Shutatara reacted poorly to being Embraced as Baali, and after months of waiting for the right moment — months during which her soul was in constant torment at what her sire was asking her to become — she fled Tyre one dark night.

Shutatara stowed away on one of the many vessels departing from Tyre for Cyprus and ended up a guest at the court of Nehemiah, the Cainite lord of that domain. She did not reveal to Nehemiah anything of her lineage or past, only that she required his sanctuary, which he gave. But after much searching, Tanith has finally followed the trail of her errant disciple to Cyprus. She knows its patron well, however, and she understands that if he can be properly “convinced” of its logic as a course of action, he will return Shutatara to her without a moment's pause. Therefore, she is now attempting to do that very thing, and the two have begun a most unusual long-distance correspondence — one that reads more like an intense classical debate than a series of letters between learned elders....

Cyprus, the Isle of Love

Geographically speaking, Cyprus is far and away the largest of the Crusader Kingdoms. It is the third largest island in the Mediterranean, stretching over 60 miles from north to south and nearly 150 from east to west. It has miles of sandy shoreline in addition to its breathtaking mountain ranges, and it is a highly defensible place on the whole, with only a handful of reliable ports at which to dock larger vessels. For

decades now — ever since the crusaders first arrived here — the island has been used as a staging ground for those who would take up the Cross, a safe haven and meeting ground for the soldiers of Christ. As a result, Cyprus is a literal island amid a sea of conflict, the one place in all Outremer where the Christians are not beset on all sides by their enemies.

Nonetheless, it is reason rather than religion that governs the Cainites of Cyprus. For over 100 years, the island has been the private sanctuary of a Brujah named Nehemiah. Embraced as a Jew in AD 492 in a small fishing village, Nehemiah resided in Jerusalem for many years. Indeed, he usually claims it as his city of origin. Nehemiah was one of many Cainites who abandoned the city — and his faith — in 1099. Unlike most of the others, however, Nehemiah did so in the *wake* of the Weeks of Blood, not in preparation for them. Along with Father Paliuro Rustucci, Nehemiah was one of few who did not succumb to the terrible frenzy that the siege brought upon the city's Cainites. He simply watched, dumbfounded, as his brothers in blood rent one another asunder amidst the mortal carnage of the First Crusade.

After surviving such a surreal experience, Nehemiah required isolation. He quietly retired to the island of Cyprus, there to complete his studies of an ancient text that he had recently acquired from a clanmate called Rathmonicus. He acquired the text some years before from Rathmonicus while the Cainite was traveling in Tyre, and he has been quietly perusing the tenets held within. These tenets taught of self-control and the ultimate repression — and thus mastery — of the Beast and its emotionally driven urges. By 1230, Nehemiah believes that he has begun to fully grasp the layers of meaning within the text, and he has been slowly shifting his belief structure toward its teachings, so that he may come to terms with and eventually utterly suppress his own Beast.

TRUE BRUJAH?

After much study, I have discovered some facts about Cainite history that I find most interesting. I quote a fragment of the Book of Nod, which was in turn quoted to a servant of mine at the Diet of Olives:

“Troile, the Child of his Child's Child, rose up and slew his Father, Brujah and ate of His flesh...”

All of this sheds a great deal of light on my temperament. The Beast does not lurk close to the surface with me, as it does in my “brethren.” My sire did not school me well in Cainite history, but then, he might have seen little point. I am no scholar, after all.

— Nehemiah of Cyprus, in a letter to Tanith

These nights, however, things are not so simple. Nehemiah has come to govern everything in his unlife through reason alone. Therefore, when other Cainites began to arrive on Cyprus, he saw no reason to forbid them to stay, as long as they upheld the laws of the island and the Old Ways. Doing so, however, had the ultimate effect of giving Nehemiah a reputation as a pushover among Cainite lords. In theory, one could do essentially as one wished on Cyprus, as long as one didn't overtly flaunt the will of its eldest resident. Therefore, Nehemiah eventually began to allow that he be referred to as the true and rightful lord of the domain, if for no other reason than to put the quietus on the spread of his appellation as Outremer's "Soft Prince."

The biggest of Nehemiah's problems, however, has arisen from a group known as the Order of Cyprus. In and of itself, the order is just another Christian military order of the sort Nehemiah has been contending with for decades. The fact that its activities conceal those of a cabal of Tremere is what's causing the problem, though. Originally, the Tremere arrived surreptitiously, using the order as a base from which to launch investigations into the mysteries of Acre before its reclamation. Even after 1212, however, they continued to reside on the island, still using the order as cover (and food) and still flaunting Nehemiah's law. Nehemiah realizes that he could "evict" them on the grounds that they breached the Second Tradition (and between his own might and the backing of the Diet of Olives, he could easily do so). He isn't sure, however, that he wouldn't be acting out of emotion and not pure reason in so doing. For now, he simply waits, watching the Tremere for signs of change one way or the other.

Another issue that takes up much of Nehemiah's time is the issue of his "houseguest," Shutatara. Some years ago, his unlife was further complicated by the arrival of this beautiful and erudite — and mute — Syrian Cainite. Someone or something had removed her tongue, leaving her unable (or unwilling) to heal it. The result is a curious situation that has aroused Nehemiah's interest more than anything in decades.

Shortly after Shutatara's arrival, Nehemiah began a correspondence with Tanith, an elder he knew from his past dealings with Tyre. Tanith has struck up what appears to be an intellectual intercourse with him, discussing everything from politics and theology to kings in her eloquent letters to him. He has come to appreciate having some cerebral stimulation in the form of a "debate partner," and honestly does not want

to see the correspondence come to an end. For this reason, more than anything, he is determined *not* to give Tanith whatever it is that she seeks from him. (He knows that she wants something, she just hasn't made her desires apparent to him, yet.) Nehemiah isn't fully aware of just how stubborn Tanith can be (and he certainly isn't aware of her true agenda), but he believes he will enjoy finding out.

In less than a year, Cyprus erupts into full-scale civil war. After Emperor Frederick II demands help from the Papacy in solving succession issues in Outremer, an army arrives in Cyprus led by one Richard Filangieri, an Italian naval marshal. In 1232, at the Battle of Agridi, Filangeri's men are finally routed by John of Ibelin, securing prosperity and independence for Cyprus (for a time, anyway). Nehemiah watches these and more events unfold with detached interest. Although he is presented with numerous opportunities during these coming conflicts, he does not act against those who question his authority on the island. Instead, he stands resolute in his indifference. Indeed, in the decades and centuries to come, all types of Cainites, counts and crusaders will come and go in Cyprus. Through it all, Nehemiah remains.

Larnaca

Set in a wide bay facing Tyre sits the beautiful and perpetually temperate village of Larnaca. All the village's prominent features are religious institutions, the foremost of which is Stavravouni Monastery — the oldest monastery in Cyprus — located just outside of town. Erected on a mountain top, it was built during the heyday of Greek Orthodoxy in Cyprus — after the last pagans had been converted or cast out, but before the arrival of the Latin Normans — by Saint Helena, the mother of Constantine the Great. According to tradition, Helena founded Stavravouni (meaning "mountain of the cross") to be a home for a fragment of the True Cross, and the monks continue to serve in this capacity faithfully. As a result, the monastery is an insular and highly traditional place of worship; no woman — or Cainite — has ever been allowed inside.

Also located in Larnaca is the Church of Agios Lazaros. Saint Lazarus is the patron saint of Cyprus, and he lived here for over 30 years after his resurrection through Christ. Lazarus was ordained bishop by Saint Mark, and in the ninth century after his death, a magnificent church was built over the saint's tomb by Emperor Leo VI. Lazarus remains adored by the Cypriots, and eight days before the annual Greek

MIRACLE OF THE STONES

Yet another important religious site in Larnaca is the area's only shrine to Islam. Also known as *hala sultan tekke*, the shrine stands in a peaceful setting amid palm trees and gardens, housing the tomb of Umm Haram — an aunt of the Prophet Muhammad. As the wife of the governor of Palestine, Umm Haram was part of the sultan's entourage during Caliph Oman's expedition to Cyprus in 647. According to legend, the elderly Arab lady died on the spot after a sudden fall from atop her mule.

In the year 1230, the gravesite is still surrounded by several buildings of a dervish monastery. Three stones carried from Mount Sinai mark the tomb of Umm Haram, one of which seems to be miraculously suspended in the air. The gravesite radiates an intensely powerful aura of the divine (Ambient Faith rating of 5) — indeed, much more potent than the history of the site would seem to dictate.

Nevertheless, by the 13th century Umm Haram's tomb has become one of the largest places of pilgrimage in Islam (after Mecca, Medina and Al-Quds), and many Muslim pilgrims come to Cyprus every year to pray and bear witness to the Miracle of the Stones. The few Cainites who have ever found opportunity to approach Umm Haram's tomb have met with considerable mental anguish, as of a great cry filling their minds, and none have thus far been able to physically approach to within 50 feet of the tomb itself. In order to keep such occurrences to a minimum, Nehemiah has decreed that none of his "guests" betray his hospitality by venturing anywhere near the resting-place of Umm Haram.

Orthodox Easter, an icon of the saint is taken in procession by the church through the streets of Larnaca. As for the church itself, it is one of the finest examples of Byzantine architecture in the world.

Unknown even to Nehemiah, Agios Lazaros is the site of a powerful ashen cult centered upon a mysterious figure known as the *Corpus Vulgata*. This entity has evoked a cult of personality around itself through the practical worship of Lazarus as a demigod. The creature is an Osiris figure to the monks of Agios Lazaros, bestowing upon them its unholy communion and solidifying its ministry with their blood. While



the *Corpus Vulgata* is certainly a Cainite, little else is known of either its lineage or origins. It might indeed be a Cappadocian follower of Lazarus, or even a powerful Malkavian with a messiah complex. What is known is that while Nehemiah remains entangled in other matters, Agios Lazaros's vitae-empowered following continues to grow unchecked...

Love Resisted Once...

Over the past several years, stories have begun to circulate through Outremer concerning a wandering pair of powerful Cainites — a man and a woman. From the northern tip of Antioch, down to the sun-bleached shores of Gaza, the tales have spread. The legend of the two has grown fat with each retelling, adding new twists to the couple's travels and travails until there is no distinguishing fact from fancy. Some say that the two were doomed to walk the holy lands of Palestine, having been cursed by God as Caine himself was, forbidden from ever again basking in His grace. Others say that the pair seeks something specific here in Outremer — a relic of some kind, or perhaps a singular and perfect place of lasting pilgrimage.

The truth of the matter is actually quite simple. This nomadic couple is none other than Belisarius and Shabah, an elder Ventrue and Assamite from far-off Constantinople. After the fall of their former home, the pair took their secret and forbidden love and fled with it to the "land of opportunity" — the Crusader Kingdoms of Outremer. For now, they are content to travel, carefree, in the way that only those in love may truly do. Their activities take them all across Outremer, but no matter what the couple's temporal goals are, their cause is always and simply one of love eternal.

Notable Cainites

Ahmed ibn Zayyat, Prince of Tripoli

7th-generation Assamite Vizier, childe of Barnabus, walker on the Road of Heaven

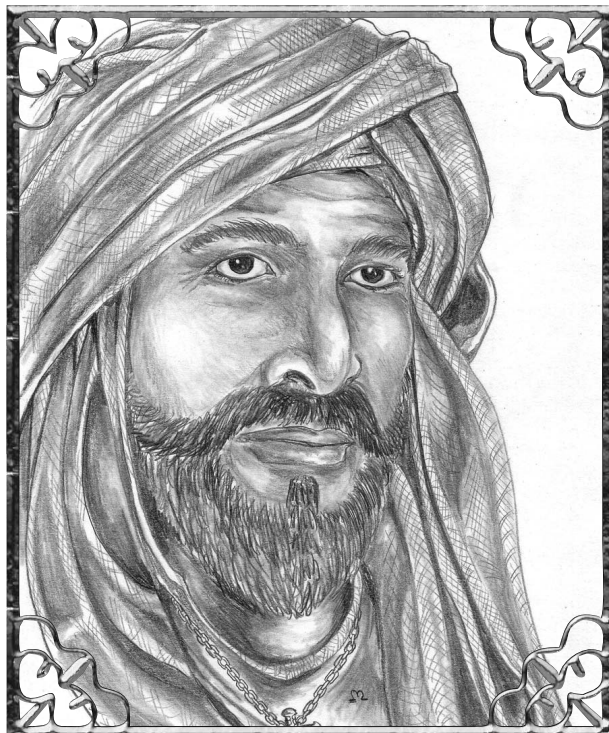
Nature: Visionary

Demeanor: Caretaker

Embrace: AD 793

Apparent Age: late 20s

Ahmed, son of Zayyat, had never been a particularly religious Arab before being chosen for the Embrace. As was typical of his family, he was Muslim by default and upbringing, rather than choice. His sire,



an Assamite vizier named Barnabus, seemed similarly religiously disinclined and, thus, nobody thought it unusual when he chose the mild-tempered Ahmed as his *fidais* in 793. Before that time, Ahmed had been a moderately successful merchant, trading in lamp oil and other necessities in his home town of Tripoli. Contacts, trade negotiations and bottom lines had always been the coin of the realm for Ahmed — never faith. Nevertheless, he took to his apprenticeship with surprising vigilance, gleaned all that he could from his learned (and quiet) mentor.

As a neonate, ibn Zayyat demonstrated an intuitive knack for his clan's ability to conceal his passing and even his features. It came to pass that his skills should be tested, and his sire chose to give him a particularly unique assignment. He was to sneak into a crusader encampment, slip into a certain tent, assassinate any guards therein and return with whatever it was that they were guarding so heavily. What followed was an experience that would shake his beliefs to their very foundations, molding and shaping the young vampire into the man he would eventually become. Ahmed ibn Zayyat became a Christian after that night, and has since come to fully realize his place in the politics of his clan and of Palestine at large. And though he never speaks of the event itself, the Assamite prince has nonetheless borne a curiously-shaped, raised scar upon the palm of his right hand ever since, a reminder of the night when he came face to face with God.

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